

Rentierism and Reform in Jordan: A Sustainable System Following the Arab Spring?

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BOSTON COLLEGE

RENTIERISM AND REFORM IN JORDAN: A SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM
FOLLOWING THE ARAB SPRING?

A SENIOR HONORS THESIS

SUBMITTED TO

THE HONORS PROGRAM

OF THE

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

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12 APRIL, 2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the wonderful CIEE professors at the Jordanian Institute of Diplomacy for allowing me to expand my understanding of the Jordanian political system. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty office in Amman, without whose help I could not have had access to the vast resources that aided my initial research on the rentier state. Specifically, I would like to thank Mr. Ralf Erbel, Mr. Riad al Khouri and Mr. Yusuf Mansur for providing me with the groundwork to begin my research while in Amman in the spring of 2012. A special thanks to my thesis advisor, Professor Kathleen Bailey, for answering all of my questions and guiding me in turning my thoughts into a cohesive project. Finally, I would like to thank the Islamic Civilization and Society department at Boston College for providing me with a Research and Travel grant in the spring of 2012 to help me begin my research in Jordan, as well as my family for supporting my research ventures during my time abroad.

Can the Rentier System in Jordan be Reformed?

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The recent wave of unrest across the Middle East has raised crucial questions about the stability of the remaining regimes in the region. Monarchies have appeared to have weathered the Arab Spring well and have emerged relatively intact while republics such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria have experienced revolutions that have completely overturned existing political and economic systems. Jordan has consistently been praised as a beacon of gradual liberalization in a region where so many dictators have ruthlessly clung to power. Upon closer inspection, however, the Jordanian system is not as well adjusted to democracy and economic capitalism as it may seem. The rentier system, most commonly found in resource rich countries, allows authoritarian regimes to co-opt their populations by using economic rent to supply goods and services usually provided by representative governments. Jordan fulfills a unique role as a rentier state because it does not possess natural resources but is instead able to co-opt its citizens as a result of the influx of external rent that the government receives through foreign aid and remittances. Drawing analysis primarily from scholarly articles and making use of media analysis and first person interviews, I examine the current problems facing the Jordanian system and the changes that have taken place as a result of the popular uprisings during the Arab Spring. The larger implications of this research present a roadmap for other entrenched regimes to follow in order to avoid falling into the self reinforcing and destructive system of favors and economic rent. While it may be too late for Jordan to reform its political system without a revolutionary overhaul, other regimes have the potential to work their way out of the rentier system before the network of rent-seeking groups in itself becomes a force that not even the regime can stop.

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Introduction: Reforming a Rentier State during the Arab Spring

While it may appear simple to grasp the concept of a state that gains support from its people through co-optive measures, what must occur for a state with no natural resources to speak of to obtain the funds necessary for a widespread bribery of its people? Any visitor to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is immediately presented with outward signs of popular support of the royal family, and King Abdullah II in particular. Pictures of the Hashemite family line the streets and pictures of King Abdullah II and his father King Hussein can be found in most cabs. Upon venturing to a supermarket or shopping center, an outsider is immediately confronted with the fact that both bread and gasoline products are extremely inexpensive for a country that lacks both oil reserves and a strong, organized agricultural community. While Jordan has still felt the calls for reform that have swept through the Middle East in the last two years, it has not experienced the same unrest and violence that have prevailed in authoritarian regimes in the region. How has Jordan managed to survive as a rentier state without any natural resources? Can the Jordanian regime remain in power in the coming years even as the rest of the region falls into chaos and revolution?

These questions regarding the rentier state are especially relevant in today's political climate in the Middle East. The revolutions that have swept through the region have toppled long standing authoritarian regimes in a matter of weeks and have brought hope to millions who live under oppressive governments. Jordan has continued to stand out amid the turmoil as a pillar of stability and as a result has been made an example of by the United States as a monarchy that is pursuing reform and listening to the demands of the people. While an initial glance at Jordanian society would agree with the statement

that Jordan is a stable monarchy with ample popular support for the king, upon further examination cracks in the system begin to appear. In a state where criticizing the king is illegal, all protests begin by praising the king and continuing on to criticize economic conditions and the government. Parliament has an astonishing rate of turnover and ministers are replaced with such frequency that the public has stopped paying attention to all of the changes. The rentier system reinforces itself and this is evident in the case of Jordan, where the powerful manipulate reforms to maintain their status at the expense of the broader population. This research is relevant to the current climate in the Middle East because many regimes are facing the same challenges that are being presented to the Jordanian regime. All rentier states need to prepare themselves for inevitable pushback against the system and can learn from any mistakes or successes that take place in Jordan. Exemplary resource rentier states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have been successful at co-opting their people up to this point in time but they will eventually reach the point at which their resources begin to diminish and they too need to adapt to the demands of their populations. The research that will be presented can serve as a road map for regimes facing these problems and is especially relevant to the new developments in terms of Islamist power in the region.

Prior research on this topic has been mainly conducted up to this point in the form of research carried out in the spring of 2012 in Amman, Jordan. Two interviews were with leading Jordanian economists, one working within the private sector and one removed from the rentier system. Primary sources in the form of newspaper reports found while in Jordan were also used alongside scholarly articles to create the foundations of the research conducted regarding the rentier state as it exists in Jordan. In order to

maintain consistency with current events, the *Jordan Times* will be relied upon as a foundational and moderately neutral source of Jordanian and Middle Eastern affairs.

Foundational works by scholars such as Karl Polanyi, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan will be relied upon in order to foster an understanding of the basics of democratizing and liberalizing conditions in any political system, as well as economic progress in general terms. Institutions such as Brookings, International Crisis Group and Carnegie will be relied upon in large measure due to the timeliness of their publications and relevance to the current issues. Authors and fellows of these institutions, such as Kenneth Pollack, Curtis Ryan, Glenn Robinson, and Salman Shaikh have written extensively on the issues of reform in the Middle East and specifically regarding the case of Jordan's economy in today's political climate.

As a result of the recent developments on the Jordanian political scene, current news articles from the *Jordan Times*, *Al Jazeera*, and the *New York Times*. *The Atlantic* magazine is also used as a reliable source based on its currency and relevance to political developments in Jordan over the past two years. Various journalists at these different news outlets will be quoted in order to prevent bias from different nations from impacting the integrity of this research. Specifically, Reuters journalist Suleiman al-Khalidi has worked with various nongovernmental organizations in Jordan and his articles have aided in contributing to the analysis of the fall 2012 protests in Jordan.

While this research finds its strengths in its relevance to current events and regime change in the Middle East, there are certain limitations to consider when reviewing any study of political and economic conditions of this kind. All reports and data that are coming out of the Middle East right now are significant because of their current

relevance, however their scope is currently lacking as a result of limited time and resources. Additionally, primary source news reports need to be evaluated in the context that they are produced under restrictive regimes wherever overt or inherent pressure may be placed on media outlets in order to portray the parties in power in a favorable light. Additionally, while much research has been conducted in the past on the conditions in rentier states that have natural resources, much less focus has been placed on states such as Jordan that exist on the basis of the external rent that they receive. The lack of detailed analysis on this subject only makes this research more important because it analyzes unusual conditions in the rentier system and applies older research to new developments.

The majority of this research relies upon content analysis, with emphasis on articles and papers from think tanks and other large research organizations. Some on-site interviews conducted in Jordan are used for background information on the Jordanian system, as well as perspective into the sentiments of the Jordanian public. In the same sense, newspaper articles and other media that have been utilized must be evaluated in the context of the current political situation that they have resulted from and not as pure and infallible fact. LexisNexis has become an invaluable resource in finding reliable English news sources. While English news sources are improving constantly, they are delayed in being published because they must first be translated into English and then distributed. Some nuances in facts and descriptions may be lost in the process of translation and add to the considerations that must be taken into account when reviewing this research.

This thesis will begin with a literature review that includes detailed sections on general rentier states and Jordan as a rentier nation. An initial overview of the literature

pertaining to the characteristics of a rent-seeking society is necessary before delving into the specific issues facing those nations that have built their legitimacy atop a system of distributing privilege and subsidies. The next section will discuss the model of a rentier state and nations that fall into this category. Saudi Arabia will be used as a case study in order to explore a state that relies upon natural resources, specifically oil, in order to gain the funds necessary to co-opt their populations. This will also include a description of the resource curse, which is another factor plaguing these nations in which reform is stifled in order to give the reeling regime more power as creativity drains from the population. The second section will delve into the conditions present in Jordan specifically as a rentier state that does not possess the vast quantity of natural resources that are present in many of the Gulf States. The external rent received by this regime allows it to fulfill the major aspects of the rentier system but the steps that Jordan must take in order to secure this rent include foreign and domestic policy that influences the amount of foreign aid it receives. Whether Jordan can be deemed a 'quasi-rentier' state or whether it is a fully fledged rentier system in its own right is an issue that is debated by many economic analysts, however the results of the system remain largely the same for its population regardless of this discrepancy. This chapter will conclude by reviewing the domestic and foreign implications of state policies that are designed in order to keep rent flowing towards the parties in power in the current political system. A brief chapter regarding the history of Jordan and its relations to Western powers has been included in order to enhance the understanding of the depth and complexity of such an economic and political system. Major historical events, such as world conflicts and significant milestones in the Arab-Israeli conflict have been included as they related to Jordanian politics.

The next chapter will be focused on the issue of rising Islamist power across the Middle East. The rentier state has evolved as a way to distribute goods and services and Islamists have emerged as the only alternative path to receiving these services outside of the government. Islamist power in Jordan, Egypt and in the Gulf will be examined in order to assess the true implications of the Arab Spring on this issue. Specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood and its power and connections in Jordan will be used as the major group that presents opposition to the existing government system. The next chapter will examine the actions of the Arab Spring, across the region and in Jordan in particular, in terms of the political and economic changes that have taken place in the past two years. Jordan's moderate political and economic reforms will be discussed, with emphasis on the much maligned electoral reform laws that have gone into effect. The question of whether significant change in Arab political systems has in fact taken place or whether the same groups remain politically entrenched despite reform and revolution will be explored. Specifically, the protests that spread through the streets of Amman during the fall of 2012 will be utilized as an example of the popular sentiment of the Arab Spring manifesting itself in mainstream Jordanian politics. The spring 2013 parliamentary elections will be discussed in order to determine if true and meaningful democratization measures were actually endorsed by the regime and if popular opinion had any real impact upon new policies and regulations. Finally, a concluding chapter will be devoted to analyzing potential plans for future democratization in the Middle East. If the rentier state can be gradually reformed without a full scale revolution then the steps necessary to achieve these measures will be addressed. States such as Egypt that have experienced a full revolution as well as states such as Jordan that are working through gradual reforms

will be compared in order to enhance understanding of the ways in which change must occur when a system has been built entirely around rent seeking groups and parties in power.

A Nation-State out of the Desert:

Jordanian History from the Great Arab Revolt to the rule of King Abdullah II

As it stands today, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has a population of about six million people, with about ninety percent of its citizens being Arabs and ninety-five percent being Muslim. There is a Christian minority that makes up five percent of the population but all citizens to maintain the freedom to practice their own religion. The government mandates compulsory, free education for children up to the age of sixteen and there are about 2.7 million students in the country. Jordanian exports consist of phosphate, cement, and potash and agriculture makes up less than ten percent of the national income. Its military is the Arab Army, which extends to the entire Arab world beyond Jordanian borders. His Majesty the King is the head of the government, chief executive and commander-in-chief, but there exists a legislative, judicial and executive branch that is headed by the Prime Minister. Through the years Jordan has existed as a historical crossing point between nations and its very creation has helped to contribute to the rentier system that currently dominates the political system.

The geographical area of TransJordan was a part of the Ottoman Empire until the end of World War I. During the First World War, British Middle Eastern foreign policy was designed to foster support against the Ottomans, as well as other Central Powers. This policy formation lacked a common direction and was regulated by three different offices: the ministry of foreign affairs, the Indian office and the Arab office. Despite the lack of common direction in British foreign policy, General McMahon was successful in gaining Arab support from Sharif Hussein against the Ottoman Empire. Although the McMahon-Hussein correspondence of 1915 was vague, it did accomplish the British goal

of inciting an Arab revolt against their Ottoman rulers. Sharif Hussein demanded that the British pledge money and political support in return for leading the Arab uprising. The British agreed to create independent Arab states in all areas except for the most contested areas of Palestine and Lebanon. McMahon's promises were vague and Hussein interpreted them as more favorable to his aims than the terms that were agreed upon by both parties. Although the title of 'king of all Arab countries' was not promised to Hussein in reality, he expected to be given this title in exchange for leading the Great Arab Revolt¹. Hussein then refused to accept the deal because the Palestinian territory was not given to him under his list of large territorial demands and feelings of distrust dominated relations between leaders of TransJordan and Great Britain from that point on.

In 1916 a secret agreement between Britain and France called the Sykes-Picot agreement came to light. This deal partitioned areas of Turkey and the Middle East to serve British and French interests before the war was even won. Both nations attempted to honor each other's interests and avoid post-war conflict, but neglected to honor the wishes of any of the people already residing in these areas. Under this agreement France was given control of the areas which are now southern Turkey, Syria and Lebanon and Britain gained southern Iran, TransJordan, the west coast of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and eastern Yemen. These territories then became mandate states following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the extent of colonialism that took place during this time paved the way for the existence of Jordan as an artificial transit state.

Following the Paris Peace Conference, the Sykes Picot agreement was put into action. TransJordan became a British mandate state where the official policy was that Britain would provide advice instead of control and that Jordan would receive its

¹ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford, UK: Westview Press, 2000), 157.

independence when it was deemed prepared. As a concession to Sharif Hussein, the British awarded his sons, Feisal and Abdullah the kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan, respectively. While the British did not see Abdullah as a competent ruler, they found it easier to simply give him control of the kingdom and the Emirate of TransJordan was recognized as an independent constitutional state in 1923.² The borders of this new state were arbitrarily made without regard for the populations already living in the Levant and Britain continued to give Abdullah large amounts of annual aid in order to keep the kingdom stable.³

Since its inception, Jordan's monarchy has relied upon support from its tribal population as a cornerstone of regime security. Sharif Hussein ensured the stability of the fledgling nation by co-opting Bedouin tribesmen and turning them into a functioning military force. He was then able to secure the boundaries of the newly founded Transjordan and continue ruling over the population. In order to win the allegiance of these nomadic tribes, Sharif Hussein had to provide them with valuable goods and services. Native Jordanians have remained invaluable to the stability of the Hashemite family. Over the years, the regime's liberalization efforts have centered on actions that can solidify support from core groups of both TransJordanians from the East Bank, as well as the local business community.⁴ Both of these groups provide the popular support that the regime needs in order to stay in power. Therefore, government actions are often based around providing additional benefits to these two demographic classes.

² Milton-Edwards, Beverly, and Peter Hinchcliffe. *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy*. 2nd ed. New York, NY:Routledge, 2001, 19.

³Ibid., 20-21.

⁴Scott Greenwood, "Jordan's 'New Bargain:' The Political Economy of Regime Security," *The Middle East Journal* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 249.

The regime's reliance on tribal support can be traced back to before the Hashemite family even gained control of TransJordan. In the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, Auda ibn Tayi states that the Turks give him money to subdue his tribe so that they will not attack passing caravans. In this system, the tribal leaders are given money to subdue their tribe and they keep some of the money for themselves while giving the rest to tribesmen.⁵ At first the Turks used this system to ensure the safety of caravans and the Hashemite family has continued the practice of giving benefits to tribal leaders to ensure their loyalty to the government. In order to preserve the stability of the government, tribal leaders needed to be given an incentive not to revolt. As the system has progressed, tribes have continued to provide necessary support for the Hashemite family and their loyalty is ensured by the benefits they reap from external rent.

Initially, bringing these tribal leaders into a new government system was crucial to the stability of Jordan. Historically, “the support lent by tribes to the ruling family must be seen as the result of a specific historical process of state-building during the formative years of the British mandate. It allowed for the integration of the tribes into the modern state and their acceptance of the political order.”⁶ Nomadic tribes made up the majority of their population and their acceptance of being ruled by a newly installed government enabled the monarchy to have power over its citizens. In the first years of King Abdullah I’s leadership, he “was careful to establish and maintain alliances with the strong nomadic tribes.”⁷ During these years the survival of fledgling TransJordan was

⁵Yusuf Mansur, interview by author, Enconsult office, March 13, 2012.

⁶ Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism, and the Modern State* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

“dependent on the strong tribes who held physical control over the country.”⁸ Jordan could not have survived as a state if it were not for the acquiescence of the tribes.

As a Middle Eastern nation formed during the European colonial era, “Jordan’s origins lie in this improbable combination of foreign and colonial regime together with indigenous Arab tribal society... [and] Jordan is commonly perceived as an artificial colonial creation.”⁹ The lack of a cohesive identity among the nomadic tribes in this area of desert has led to the idea that Jordan does not have a historical or geographic reason to exist as a state. Britain’s heavy hand in dividing up the Middle East into nation states left TransJordan in a weak political position because it did not possess significant sea ports, natural resources, or historically significant cities and instead gave the tribes critical power over this new state. Beginning in the 1920s, the reliance on tribal leaders as middlemen between the government and its people “blurred the boundaries between state and society.”¹⁰ These tribal elders were suddenly given political power as a result of the system they had arbitrarily been placed in by Britain.

There were certainly positive and negative effects of European interference in Middle Eastern affairs. During the period of indirect British rule, “the chieftancy continued to operate alongside the central government. Moreover, the nomadic tribes benefited from the existence of weak, limited government and continued to enjoy complete autonomy in the desert until the end of the decade.”¹¹ This system of governance gave power to tribal leaders instead of political officials and led to the East Bank tribes becoming a significant rent seeking group in current affairs as well.

⁸ Ibid..

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹¹ Ibid., 61-62.

However, it was in line with British security interests for the Jordanian infrastructure to be built up in order to maintain law and order. In 1925, networks of roads, trains, telegraph, and telephone lines were funded by the British government.¹² Without this financial and logistical assistance, the Jordanian government would not have been able to develop as quickly. While the actions taken by Britain immediately following the formation of this nation-state stunted its political growth, they also aided in the creation of a modern state in an undeveloped area.

While Transjordan continued to be a British colonial possession, its fifteen years under the control of another country came to a close in the 1940s. As a result of Cold War tensions, the United States had determined that “Jordan [was] an important barrier to the spread of radical Arab influence and communist infiltration. Hence, the White House declared that the independence of Jordan was vital to the United States.”¹³ A few years after Jordan became an independent nation under King Abdullah I, in April of 1957, Washington gave Jordan a ten million dollar grant which “was an indication that the United States has indeed replaced Great Britain in Jordan.”¹⁴ As a part of the strategic alliances built up during this time in history, Jordan was pulled into the Cold War system as an ally of American. This vital support during the first decade of Jordan’s status as an independent state caused the United States to be a major player in shaping the boundaries of the Middle East.

The creation of Israel in 1948 engulfed the entire region in turmoil. Abdullah responded to the violence by proclaiming himself king of all Palestine and attempted to

¹² Ibid., 63.

¹³ Miriam Joyce, *Anglo-American Support for Jordan: The Career of King Hussein* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 20.

¹⁴ Ibid.

gain popular support for his rule.¹⁵ The annexation of the West Bank by Jordan isolated King Abdullah from the rest of the Arab world, but gained him favor with the Western powers and Jordan was finally recognized as an independent nation by the United States in 1949.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Abdullah's imperial aspirations across the Middle East did not bode well for relations with other Arab nations and he was assassinated at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in 1951. The kingdom remained in a state of turmoil, with both internal threats resulting from succession to the throne and external threats from the Arab-Israeli conflict to their stability following Abdullah's death.

King Talal assumed power following a brief power struggle between himself and a half-brother of the late King Abdullah. Loyalties shifted constantly as a result of fighting both within the kingdom and across the Middle East. During this time the "benevolent despotism [of Jordan's] political system illustrat[ed] just how far behind had been left the naiveté of its youth."¹⁷ The most major accomplishment of King Talal's reign was the 1946 reform of the constitution, which allowed for a separation from policies that were dominant during the period of heavy handed British influence. Additionally, the new constitution that was passed in 1952 emphasized the role that Islam played as the official state religion, as well as embraced a parliamentary system that adhered to the modern sense of a legislature.¹⁸ King Talal's behavior during this year became increasingly erratic and his refusal to abdicate the throne resulted in his forced resignation due to provisions made in the constitution he himself created.¹⁹ Talal's short

¹⁵ Greenwood, "Jordan's New Bargain," 30.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷ Robins, Philip. *A History of Jordan*. N.p.: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 79.

¹⁸ Milton-Edwards, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy*, 33-34.

¹⁹ Robins, *A History of Jordan*, 82.

rule did implement much needed reforms but the frequent transitions of power did not help the country develop its economy or political systems in any durable change.

King Hussein took the throne in 1953 and inherited a slew of socio-political problems, the most pressing of which was the refugee crisis that had erupted as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Security in the kingdom was constantly threatened by power plays from other Middle Eastern nations seeking to increase their own territorial aspirations and as a result from “this point onwards real political power and authority in the country became the preserve of the few rather than the many.”²⁰ A strong executive was necessary in order to maintain the fragile political system that had been created. During this period the power of the Diwan, or Royal Court, emerged as a way to represent the king’s policy directly to the tribal units that made up the cornerstone of support for the regime.²¹ In a system dominated by tribes, Hussein became the patriarchal leader of the entire country during his extensive reign.

Hussein’s rule was by no means a period of peace for the country and some of the most significant battles between the Israelis and the Palestinians took place while he was king. The large number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan caused public opinion to support action against the newly formed Zionist state. King Hussein agreed to join Syria and Egypt in attacking Israel in June 1967 although he knew a military defeat would be soon to follow. The Six-Day war was a disaster politically for Jordan because both the West Bank and East Jerusalem were captured by Israeli forces. Despite this loss of territory and defeat in terms of international diplomacy, Jordanians remained aligned with the Palestinian cause and the refugee situation has led to between forty and sixty percent of

²⁰ Milton-Edwards, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy*, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

the population identifying themselves as Palestinians.²² Jordan continued to receive international aid for the presence of these refugees but their influence on the internal politics of Jordan was not always positive.

Following the Six-Day War, all Arab states joined together and made a statement against Israel, called the Khartoum Resolution. This meeting took place on 1 September 1967 and stated 'no' to three concepts: no peace with Israel, no recognition of the Israeli state, and no to negotiations with Israel.²³ While this meeting sent a message of Arab solidarity to the international community, Jordan had its own internal problems distracting King Hussein from pushing for a peace agreement. The Palestinian Liberation Organization, PLO, had been largely expelled from Israeli territory and their leaders moved into refugee camps on Jordanian soil to begin organizing a resistance. They began launching attacks and raids from inside Jordanian territory and even set up military checkpoints throughout the country. These guerillas considered their organization to be so powerful in Jordan that they chose a strip of Jordanian desert to land three separate hijacked planes on 6 September 1970. King Hussein appeared to be powerless to stop the guerillas and in a subsequent speech he assured the *fedayeen* that he would not attempt to "destroy them under any circumstances."²⁴ *Fedayeen* groups posed a serious challenge to Jordanian stability during this period of time. King Hussein would have angered public sentiment by expelling the PLO but he risked retribution from Israel for allowing them to operate within his borders.

²² Malik Mufti, "A King's Art: Dynastic Ambition and State Interest in Hussein's Jordan," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 13, no. 3 (August 2002): 4, doi:10.1080/714000336.

²³ Joyce, *Anglo-American Support for Jordan*, 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

Between 1954 and 1969, the United States had given half of a billion dollars to the Jordanian government as aid. King Hussein pressed for still more support from the American government, damages from the Six-Day War and Israeli reprisals to *fedayeen* raids as evidence of Jordan's needs. He threatened to turn to the Soviet Union for help if Jordan was not given more financial aid. In response, the United States agreed to help in modernizing Jordanian forces and gave about \$100 million of military equipment to the military.²⁵ Cold War tensions were utilized by Hussein shrewdly in order to gain more financial and military support for his kingdom. By continuing to play off of American fears of increasing Soviet influence in the Middle East, Hussein successfully increased Jordan's political significance because his requests could not be ignored by American officials.

During the 1970s, when the PLO established its headquarters in Amman and accumulated more and more political power, it created a 'state within a state'. Hussein's power as monarch was challenged by paramilitary groups patrolling the streets of the capital and Israel threatening to attack Jordan because of its harboring of this group. King Hussein was eventually forced to take action during Black September in 1970 when he ordered military strikes to take place against the *fedayeen* network. This action directly confined the PLO to refugee camps in Jordan and indirectly increased Hussein's own authoritarian rule while reinforcing the national identity.²⁶ A more powerful executive was necessary in order to continue the existence of Jordan but it simultaneously limited political freedoms throughout the country.

²⁵Ibid., 36-7.

²⁶Milton- Edwards, *Jordan: A Hashemite Legacy*, 42-43.

In 1971 King Hussein went on an international tour, and in his meetings with leaders of the United Kingdom, Syria, and Egypt he determined that “Jordan was prepared to accept a unified Arab army on its soil, but only under Jordanian command.”²⁷ During a visit to Tel Aviv on 25 September 1973, King Hussein warned Israeli intelligence, the Mossad, of an impending attack from Egypt and Syria. While Israel did not take this threat seriously, troops from both Arab nations went to war with Israel on 6 October. Jordan allowed Arab militaries to cross over its soil, but did not commit men directly to the fighting.²⁸ The conflict was ended by UN Resolution 338, which was passed on 22 October. It dictated that all involved nations must stop military action and that Resolution 242 must be implemented, although it did not bring true peace because Israel continued to occupy Arab territory.²⁹ Jordan did not lose any more land during this conflict, however it did not regain any of the areas lost to Israeli occupation and therefore King Hussein was hesitant to accept the Rabat Declaration of 1974, which gave the PLO the status of the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. After being promised an annual subsidy of \$300 million from the Gulf States, King Hussein agreed to accept this declaration.³⁰

The renewed violence between Arabs and Israelis in 1973 was largely considered a victory for Arab interests. Arab forces were financed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and appeared to be winning for about three weeks until Israel pushed back, using an enormous amount of American foreign aid. The Israeli economy was badly damaged by this war, which the Arabs regarded as a victory. Following the conflict, Egyptian

²⁷ Joyce, *Anglo-American Support for Jordan*, 120.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

President Anwar Sadat signed a surprise agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin at the Camp David Accords of 1978, which was later followed by a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Jordan then followed suit in 1994 as a concession to receive continued international aid and trade benefits during a time of economic crisis in the country.

During the 1980s, King Hussein made a major foreign policy move that consisted of creating the Arab Cooperation Council. This move followed the end of the Iran-Iraq War and was meant to facilitate capital and labor flows between Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen.³¹ This agreement was intended to accelerate the money coming into Jordan, both from remittances and direct aid. While this agreement fell apart after the First Gulf War, its creation shows the importance of securing these sources of external rent. In order for the regime to survive, it needs to constantly be receiving external rent, which it can then use to further co-opt the population.

Jordan has traditionally relied on Iraq as a source of cheap oil. This economic relationship became controversial when Saddam Hussein lost favor with the international community. Tensions between Saddam and the West came to a head in 1990 during the First Gulf War, when a U.S.-led international coalition attacked in order to push Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. Jordan was hesitant in supporting the coalition, and King Hussein's lack of action resulted in a severe cut to the aid Jordan received from the West. Following this foreign policy misstep, "Jordanian government officials remain[ed] wary of future such diplomatic- and more importantly *economic*- rifts with external benefactors."³²

Without the external rent in the form of foreign aid, the rentier system could not continue

³¹Curtis R Ryan, "'Jordan First': Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations and Foreign Policy under King Abdullah II," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 52.

³²*Ibid.*, 46.

to support the political elites. After the First Gulf War, Jordan's leaders were careful not to oppose actions of the West for fear of losing these funds.

Immediately following Jordan's fall from grace in the eyes of the international community, King Hussein revived the standing of his country by putting his efforts into alleviating the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1994, Jordan signed an independent peace treaty with Israel and was quickly rewarded by an influx of aid into the country. This was beneficial to the regime because "the intromission of such international support lowered the cost of domestic repression and fulfilled key political needs."³³ Peace with Israel meant that the United States "and its allies delivered mounting flows of economic aid and security assistance to Amman."³⁴ Jordan could now rely on a substantial flow of aid from the West because it had made peace with Israel. In return, the regime could utilize this money to continue its policies of cooption with the people and maintain their monopoly on power.

When King Abdullah ascended to the throne, he continued his father's policies of foreign actions based upon securing external rent. Jordan continued to support the United States following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. As a reward for supporting the West against terrorism, the U.S. doubled its aid package to Jordan and both countries signed a free trade agreement.³⁵ The king himself travelled to Washington to meet with President Bush in order to secure the free trade agreement between these two nations. Exports from Jordan to the U.S. rose from 18 million in 1998 to one billion by 2009,

³³ Sean L. Yom and Mohammad H Al-Momani, "The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability: Jordan in the Post-Cold War Era," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁵ Ryan, "Jordan First," 54.

greatly raising the revenue flowing into Jordan.³⁶ These additional funds allowed the regime to continue to subvert public opinion by providing goods and services desired by the population. During this time period the government expenditures increased while the “rift between state and society was...steadily growing.”³⁷ The Jordanian people remained marginally disenfranchised by the rentier system receiving substantial amounts of external rent in reward for its pro-West policies.

King Abdullah did not stop at placating Western powers to obtain external rent. He began by focusing on Jordan’s relations with the oil-wealthy Iraq. Although Iraq still had an embargo on its goods according to the United Nations, Jordan broke this embargo and sent medical supplies and “high-level government delegations to Baghdad.”³⁸ This move enabled Jordan to get back in Saddam’s good graces and therefore continue to secure cheap oil from a nearby source. As a resource poor nation, Jordan is forced to rely on these external rents in order to maintain the rentier system. By reaching out to Iraq, King Abdullah was once again able to utilize foreign policy to maintain the stability of the Jordanian system.

Having learned its lesson from the First Gulf War, Jordan did not dare to oppose the actions of America during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While King Hussein had chosen to stay out of the international coalition in 1990, King Abdullah made Jordan “a logistical linchpin for the Iraqi invasion, providing over-flight to American combat jets and hosting thousands of Western military personnel.”³⁹ Although public sentiment sided with Iraq during this period of time, the Jordanian government chose to repress the will of the

³⁶ King Abdullah II, *Our Last Best Chance: The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril* (London:Penguin Group, 2011), 167-8.

³⁷Ryan, “Jordan First,” 54.

³⁸Ibid., 53.

³⁹Yom, “The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability,” 50-1.

people once again and support the cause that would bring them the most foreign revenue. Jordan was then further rewarded by a one billion dollar grant in 2003 to compensate for the costs incurred during the Iraqi invasion.⁴⁰ As a result of his foreign policy decisions, King Abdullah was able to further strengthen the power of the regime.

Jordan's foreign policy today is dependent on issues mainly regarding the war on terrorism and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Jordanian regime must be careful to aid its financial allies in hunting down terrorist cells. Specifically, the international community applauded Jordanian intelligence for arresting eleven alleged Al-Qaeda operatives in October of 2012 who were plotting to attack commercial targets in Amman and Western diplomats on an international scale.⁴¹ The regime has retained its Western favor by continuing to cooperate in tracking down terrorists. Additionally, Jordan must remain conscious of its relations in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The 1967 borders have been a point of contention throughout the sporadic negotiations that have taken place between Palestinians and Israelis. While conflict resolution hinges on more than simple land concessions, border issues have continued to directly impact Jordan. Currently, "King Abdullah is known as an advocate of two states for two peoples—Israel secure in its pre-1967 borders, Palestine to be established in Gaza and the West Bank."⁴² The large amount of Palestinians in Jordan has made the conflict a hugely significant factor in any of King Abdullah's policy decisions.

⁴⁰Ibid., 52.

⁴¹ "Jordan 'al Qaeda Plot Uncovered,'" *BBC*, October 21, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20023830>.

⁴² Karen Leigh, "Jordan's King Holds On, despite Rising Discontent," *TIME*, June 17, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2078195,00.html>.

Politics and Relations of Rentier States

Prevailing research on rentier states has focused on resource rich states, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, along with other Gulf monarchies that have the ability to spend oil revenues on providing goods and services to their populations instead of offering democratic incentives to maintain power. This foundational theory is then applied to the case of Jordan, while taking into account that the Hashemite Kingdom's rent comes from external sources and not natural resources. Jordan can be compared and contrasted against these oil-rich nations because it has still been able to stave off major calls for liberalization that have occurred during the Arab Spring. The mainstream viewpoint on this theory is that rentier states have extra funds on hand from the rent they receive and therefore have been able to continue co-opting their populations and avoid the backlash from the Arab Spring.

In Brenda Shaffer's *Energy Politics*, the author explores the realm of high energy-export regimes. The author describes the general tendency of energy exporters to have a distinctive pattern of economic and political development. These nations tend to have the highest foreign debt, lowest rate of democratic governance and the lowest levels of human development. Additionally, policy techniques that are usually utilized to promote democratic governance are not applicable to these types of regimes.⁴³ Her overarching study of energy exporters supports the argument that these types of regimes inherently fall into a category of states that do not offer political or economic liberalization to their citizens.

A rentier state is defined by the basic economic relationship that exists between a government and its citizens. While typically a state must raise its own revenue and

⁴³Brenda Shaffer, *Energy Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 5.

maintains accountability to its people through its institutions, a rentier state is able to supersede this accountability by directly co-opting its citizens. Instead of imposing taxes to fund its activities, a rentier state receives "rent [that] is external to the economy."⁴⁴ The rentier state is therefore able to provide its citizens with additional benefits that it would not be able to fund without this external source of revenue.

Receiving external rents allows a government to avoid taxation and therefore escape from some measure of accountability. Without a true system of taxation, the government becomes "autocratic and independent to [the social] classes."⁴⁵ Instead of remaining accountable through the system of taxation in exchange for representation, the rentier state is able to hold more control over its citizens because it is the sole distributor of rent. Citizens cannot use institutions to hold the government accountable because they must work within the rentier system that has been created. In this way, the government is able to use external rents to create "political loyalty in citizens and make a valid promise [that is not necessarily] economically effective."⁴⁶ As opposed to a system in which accountability and representation prevail, a rentier state is able to keep its citizens loyal by having low or non-existent taxes. In the absence of taxes, citizens are not able to effectively petition for changes in government because the government is the only system that is able to provide them with necessary goods and services.

Another consequence that results from the lack of taxation in the rentier system is the detrimental effect on development of the state itself. The rentier state "by liberating itself from the necessity of tax collection...unwittingly diminishes its own administrative

²⁶ Douglas A. Yates, "The Theory of the Rentier State," in *The Rentier State in Africa: Oil Rent Dependency and Neocolonialism in the Republic of Gabon* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 13.

²⁷ Mojtaba Maghsoudi and Majid Khorshidi, "Solutions out of the Crisis of Democracy in the Middle East," *Canadian Social Science* 7, no. 1 (2011): 19.

⁴⁶Ibid.

capacity.”⁴⁷ Although the government is still receiving revenue from external sources, it is using these funds to provide direct compensation to the people instead of building the necessary institutions to help the growth of state infrastructure in the long run. The political influence that the distribution of rent gives to the government takes away any incentive for the government to foster institutions that would help citizens obtain goods and services on their own.⁴⁸ The presence of external rents allows the government to obtain and maintain autocratic control over its citizens. However, this amount of control is often harmful to the very existence of the state system because political and social institutions are not created and therefore the state must continue to provide for its people. People remain loyal to the state not as a result of its political institutions but because of the inherent dependence of the population on the government in the rentier system.

As a result of the external rent received by the state, development is discouraged. It can be argued that "the welfare and prosperity imported from abroad 'pre-empts some of the urgency for change and rapid growth' and may in fact coincide with 'socio-political stagnation and inertia.'"⁴⁹ Government distribution of external rents takes away from movements for social and economic change because citizens are able to receive goods and services from the government although they do not possess a true justification for their political power. A government that needs to tax its people in order to obtain revenue for projects and services is more accountable than one that can simply rely on external rents. Social participation is discouraged in the rentier system because the state is providing goods and services for loyal citizens without the presence of political parties.

⁴⁷Yates, *"The Theory of the Rentier State,"* 33.

⁴⁸Ibid., 33-34.

⁴⁹ Mahdavy, "The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States", 437 as quoted in Yates, 21.

The rentier system is also inherently harmful to the work ethic of the population as a whole. Governments receiving external rents retain the exclusive power to award valuable government contracts and jobs. These positions are given "as an expression of gratitude rather than as a reflection of economic rationale."⁵⁰ Loyalty to the regime is cultivated because wealth is earned not as a result of personal exertion but because of personal connections and pure chance.⁵¹ Active participation is not encouraged within the rentier system because work ethic is not rewarded and the rentier provides citizens with the goods and services they desire.

Shaffer breaks down the attributes of an oil exporting state even further and states that three factors make up the rentier system. The first is the income from natural resources is the most important input into the nation's economy.⁵² If other goods are necessary exports that keep the country's economy afloat then the diversification of the system will prevent the political and economic conditions necessary to the rentier system. Secondly, the majority of the revenue received by the state must come from abroad.⁵³ Domestic production of revenue would allow decentralization of power from the hands of the elite to the hands of the population, which would give the people a larger say in demanding liberalization measures. This second factor also applies to nations that do not export natural resources but instead rely on other foreign sources of revenue to perpetuate their own rentier nature. Finally, Shaffer points to the factor of a small portion of the population being engaged in generating the revenues and/or rents of the nation.⁵⁴ If this

⁵⁰Yates, "The Theory of the Rentier State," 22.

⁵¹Ibid., 21.

⁵²Shaffer, *Energy Politics*, 23.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

condition is met then power can be centralized in the hands of the few, who can then exclude the majority of the population from participating in democratic manner.

Beyond these three basic factors that make up Shaffer's depiction of a rentier state, Shaffer agrees with the argument of Yates in stating that the state acting as a distributor is an essential feature of rentierism. These regimes take on the role of distributor of rents "instead of extracting revenue from the population through taxation, and thus [avoid] having to earn legitimacy from the public."⁵⁵ While states that do not receive the majority of their revenue from export sales must rely on the population to give them legitimacy, rentier regimes have the ability to use their revenue to remove themselves from the ebbs and flows of public opinion. This distribution power denies any demands for liberalization measures that the public might call for, because they are economically provided for by the state.

Michael Ross organizes his argument on oil-wealthy states in a slightly different manner than Yates and Shaffer. He takes both a qualitative and quantitative approach and examines the basic definitions of the rentier state before delving into an analysis of three casual mechanisms that contribute to the lack of democracy in oil producing states. Ross attributes the original definition of the rentier state to Hussein Mahdavy, who stated that a rentier state was one that received "substantial rents from 'foreign individuals, concerns or governments.'"⁵⁶ This primary definition provided the basis for classifying states that had access to large amounts of revenue coming into their country from external sources. Ross then acknowledges Hazem Beblawi as the scholar who refined this definition and

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Hussein Mahdavy, "The Patterns and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in M.A. Cook, ed. *Studies in Economic History of the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 428 in Ross, Michael, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" *World Politics* 53, April 2001, 329.

stated that rents must come from foreign actors, accrue directly to the state, and only a small number of elites may be involved in the generation of rent.⁵⁷ Both of these definitions feed directly into the argument made by Shaffer and do not contradict any of the rentier theory that has been perpetuated thus far.

Ross then breaks from other scholars in the field to organize three causal mechanisms that he believes to be the most important contributions to the association between oil exports and the lack of democracy. The first of these mechanisms is the rentier effect itself. Under this effect there are many attributes that cause a resource rich nation to be able to fulfill the functions necessary for the denial of liberalization. Ross defines the taxation effect as a phenomenon in which governments that receive income from oil are less likely to tax their population and therefore the population will demand little or no accountability.⁵⁸ Ross even pulls from Laurie Brand's research on the topic to support this statement because it shows that during the 1980s when Jordan received less foreign aid, it was forced to decrease subsidies and calls for greater representation spread throughout the country.⁵⁹ The taxation idea continues to support the previous theories, but organizationally Ross's comments differ from other scholars in the field.

While still considering the rentierism mechanism, another aspect of this theory is the spending effect. Oil wealth leads to greater spending on patronage within a nation and therefore reduces pressure for democratization.⁶⁰ While all authoritarian regimes utilize funds towards increasing patronage, states with oil exports have a much larger volume of

⁵⁷ Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987), 51 as cited in Michael Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?" 329.

⁵⁸ Michael Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy," 332.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 333.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

revenue entering their country and being funneled directly into the hands of the elite. This idea feeds into the last aspect of the rentier mechanism, which is the group formation effect. When a government has sufficient funds, it can prevent the formation of independent social groups that would be most likely to call for political reform.⁶¹ Whether states under the rentier mechanism actively prevent the formation of independent civil society groups or whether oil wealth naturally discourages social groups from forming is a point that Ross acknowledges dispute upon but does not choose a side.⁶² Within the rentier mechanism, taxation, spending, and group formation are the three most important actions that Ross identifies as contribution to the notable lack of democratic movement. While other rentier scholars would not disagree with these statements, Ross organized his theory in a clear way that showed the direct correlation between the large volume of revenue flowing into a resource rich nation and the ineffectiveness and infrequency of calls for democracy.

The repression effect cannot be ignored when dealing with rentier states and their economies. Resource wealth allows rentier states to increase their military and security forces to ensure that any opposition to the government does not challenge the stability of the state.⁶³ This phenomenon occurs specifically in the Middle East, where “democratization has been inhibited in part by the prevalence of the *mukhabarat* (national security) state.”⁶⁴ A constant secret police presence hinders any type of democratic group formation because any groups or fledgling political parties that may oppose the government are closely monitored by the state. Freedom of expression is damaged in

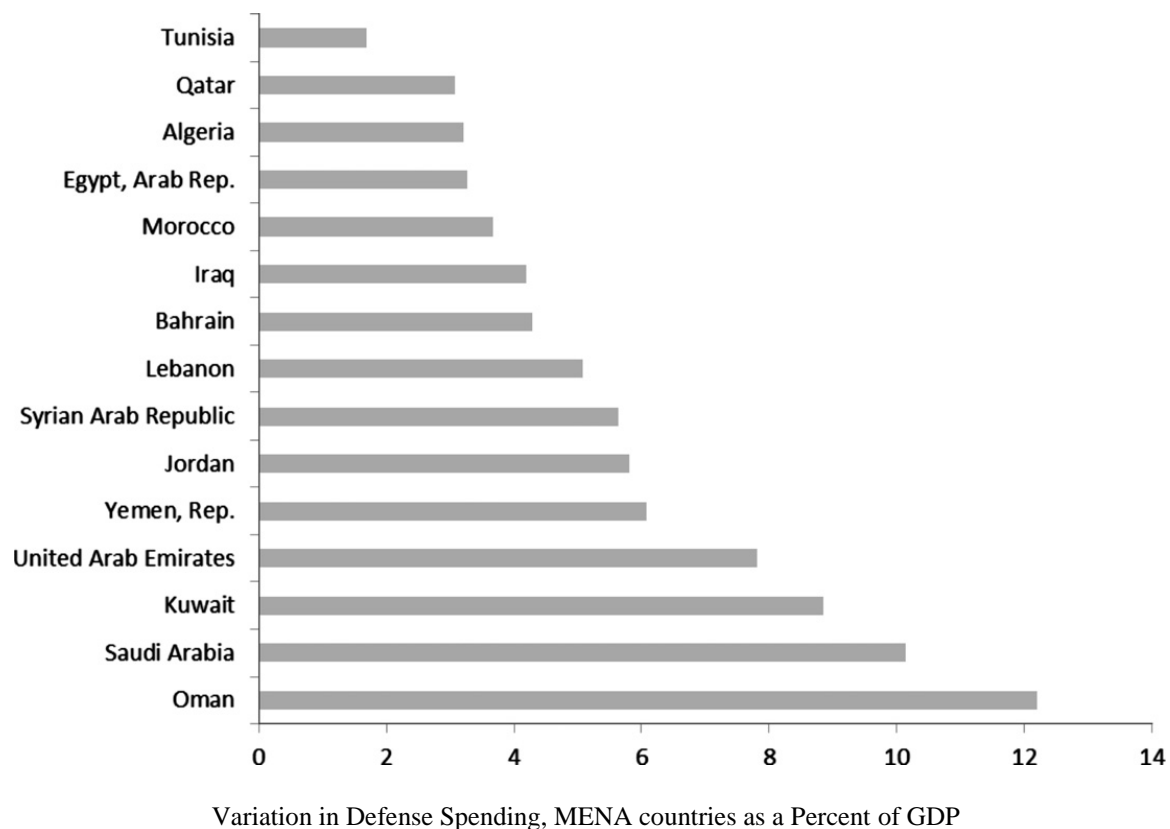
⁶¹ Ibid., 334.

⁶² Ibid., 335.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

these cases because citizens cannot speak out without fear of retribution from the government.



Adeel Malik and Bassem Awadallah, "The Economics of the Arab Spring," *World Development*, 2013, 7.

Events of the Arab Spring have raised the issue of economics to the forefront of any political discussion in the Middle East. Many of the protests began as a result of the “stagnation of the Arab economies” in the region that snowballed into a larger chain of events leading to reforms and, in some cases, regime change.⁶⁵ Rentier states have always utilized their wealth to subdue the population, but with the economic downturn of 2008 many states suffered considerable losses to their rent. Economic significance plays into the argument that prosperity will satisfy the demands of the people and “undermine their

⁶⁵ Kenneth M. Pollack, "Understanding the Arab Awakening," 2011, in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 2.

demands for political reform.”⁶⁶ Rentier states utilize their resources in order to co-opt their populations and recessions often strain their very lifelines. The vast networks of repression, concessions and loyalty that support these states cannot function without constant financial input.

A wave of democracy swept through the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring protests, but many states could not sustain the path towards representative government. Stephen Grand argues that democracy requires a long term engagement from its citizens in order to be fully successful.⁶⁷ Many states have embarked on a democratic path as a result of a popular movement in favor of more representation only to fall victim to civil war, cooptation by insiders, a new authoritative system, or have become a hybrid regime.⁶⁸ If Jordan were to enact reforms leading towards democracy or be more severely impacted by a revolution, the new leaders would have to exercise vigilance in order not to fall into these common traps listed by Stephen Grand. The issues that Grand raises have been observed in other nations that have pursued liberalization measures only to become a state with a system with more repression and corruption than before.

All of the Brookings contributors offer different advice for fledgling democracies, and all of them agreed on the significance of civil society. Grand advocates the United States focusing foreign aid in these nations on education and civic organizations in order

⁶⁶ Kenneth M. Pollack, "Reform: Convincing Reluctant Regimes to Change," 2011, in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East*(Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 141.

⁶⁷Stephen R. Grand, "Democratization 101: Historical Lessons for the Arab Spring," 2011, in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East*(Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

to encourage bottom up reforms that will be sustainable in the long term.⁶⁹ In a chapter written with Shadi Hamid and other Brookings contributors, Grand again refers to civil society as being able to generate “the impetus to reform beyond the initial transition period.”⁷⁰ If citizens stop supporting democratization measures then there is no hope left for officials to follow through on promises of reform. Popular support is the most important sponsor of liberalization and its absence means that the incentive to make even gradual changes will slowly fall away.

Beyond simply achieving an atmosphere that fosters civil society, new democracies should be concerned with the respect for rule of law. Any politician can make sweeping reforms that will not be followed by citizens if respect for the law and enforcement measures are not present. Brookings contributors once again emphasize a “democratic political culture” in which the rule of law is respected and all disputes are “handled by a defined and transparent legal system overseen by an independent judiciary able to render judgment and have those judgments respected and implemented *by all parties*.”⁷¹ While this description is detailed and all of these institutions cannot appear overnight in developing democracies, this checklist would enable countries in transition to ensure that they are making progress in the right direction. Bottom up reform would make steps toward attaining and maintaining a stable rule of law system more credible and secure. Both popular support and the rule of law make up the foundations of a democracy in which repression and corruption have no place. Only after these initial

⁶⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁷⁰ Shadi Hamid et al., "Making Reform Credible: The Critical Piece of the Puzzle," 2011, in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 155.

⁷¹ Kenneth M. Pollack, "Democratizers? The Pursuit of Pluralism," 2011, in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 89.

steps have been taken can states transition to a fully liberal system that endorses elections, reform and accountability.

General Theory of a Rentier State

The Middle East is home to some of the most resource rich nations on the planet. In addition to holding most of the Earth's oil reserves, these states also exhibit characteristics of extreme authoritarianism. While typically a state with more resources would utilize the flow of its revenue for economic development and eventual political liberalization, Middle Eastern states that possess these great reserves of oil and natural gas have pursued a path of dictatorship and oppression of their citizens. Typically, states that are able to sustain such a system utilize the rent that they receive from resource to co-opt their populations and discourage citizens from seeking any form of democracy. Leaders of these states have created numerous internal and external problems for themselves because they are forced to work within the rentier system. While these states are inherently undemocratic because of their resource wealth, understanding how rentier states operate in the Gulf is crucial to the development of the Jordanian quasi-rentier system.

Rentier states in the Middle East are concentrated in the Gulf region, where many states are able to utilize their oil resources to generate a majority of their national incomes. In general, "the expression 'rentier state' refers to a country that garners a substantial portion of its income from external resources such as oil and gas."⁷² Using an example of an extreme rentier economy, in 2008, Saudi Arabia's oil, gas and mineral

⁷²Donald L. Losman, "The Rentier State and National Oil Companies: An Economic and Political Perspective," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 428.

rents made up 89.3% of its government revenue and 60.7% of GDP.⁷³ In the case of Saudi Arabia, such a significant portion of the nation's income is generated from natural resources that its economy is wholly dependent upon the price of oil. When oil prices are stable, the state is able to use the revenues that it receives from oil and natural gas to provide goods and services to its population that discourage its citizens from seeking democratic alternatives in government. As long as the state is able to continue generating these types of revenue, it can distribute rent among groups that support the regime.

Rentier states survive on the principle of taxation and representation. The state does not need to tax its citizens and therefore these regimes can function without much accountability from the people. "In the ideal-type rentier state, the state has a large degree of autonomy from society by virtue of external revenue; it delivers 'goods' to the population, demanding little in return except acquiescence."⁷⁴ If any of these states were forced to extract more than minimal taxes from their people their regimes would therefore be held accountable by their own citizens demanding a say in government. Once the system collects money from its people it can no longer be immune to popular opinion. These rentier systems and Gulf States in particular, are able to placate their populations not only through providing goods and services but additionally through the lack of taxation.

As a result of the revenues that rentier states receive from external sources, their populations are less inclined to demand representation in government. While many capitalist and Western nations function on the basis that "the extraction of taxes and public sacrifice evoke responses from those taxed," rentier states are able to avoid taxing

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴Gerd Nonneman, "Rentiers and Autocrats, Monarchs and Democrats, State and Society: The Middle East between Globalization, Human 'Agency', and Europe," *International Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January 2001): 145.

their citizens.⁷⁵ In combination with provision of goods and services, the lack of taxation discourages those living under rentier systems from seeking reform in government. States with vast oil resources in the Gulf have found that “there is little need to develop mechanisms of fiscal accountability for their citizens since the latter have been ‘bought off’ by the absence of taxes and the provision of social services and state-subsidized commodities.”⁷⁶ Lack of taxes along with the provision of inexpensive or free goods and services has led to a politically apathetic population in these nations and a lack of political development in general. These regimes can therefore rule as they wish as long as they continue placating the people with rent.

State subsidies are an integral part of the regime’s appeal to its citizens under the renter system. The average motor fuel retail price from 2002 through 2004 in the United States was two dollars and ten cents, whereas the retail price in Saudi Arabia was only sixty four cents.⁷⁷ Saudi Arabia’s leaders were able to offer this extreme subsidy only as a result of strong global oil prices, but as a result the regime offered its people more of an incentive to remain politically apathetic. In the rentier states of the Gulf, “oil revenues have enabled a social contract to evolve wherein untaxed citizens receive substantial and costly government services, making the public far less concerned about what goes on inside government as long as it is the recipient of such benefits.”⁷⁸ Specifically in the case of subsidies, rentier regimes are allowed to operate with autonomy because of their generous financial aid given to citizens. This system can continue to function as long as the state keeps funding basic goods and services that are readily available to the people.

⁷⁵ Losman, “The Rentier State and National Oil Companies,” 429.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 434.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 435.

Potential Flaws in the Rentier System

Despite the seemingly ideal conditions that exist for dictators under the rentier system, there are many potential problems that arise when a regime builds its legitimacy on the basis of its external rent. “Since the state is the main dispenser of economic favors, those unhappy with their share have an obvious and visible target for their discontentment.”⁷⁹ In many cases groups that do not receive rent focus all of their efforts on trying to discredit the ruling party instead of addressing the underlying issues of underrepresentation. Furthermore, because these governments cannot cite popular approval to legitimize their rule, they are forced to rely on “moral and cultural grounds” that are easily manipulated.⁸⁰ The insecure reasoning for their rule does not help dictators who have excluded substantial portions of their populations from receiving rent. These regimes must utilize secondary reasoning to support their rule and therefore cannot enjoy the same type of stability in their rule as popularly elected leaders because rentier rulers only have the advantage of their rent.

Beyond the inherent problems in the justification of the legitimacy of rentier leaders, this type of economic system is inefficient. Subsidized goods and the “sales [from them] serve to reduce the profit pool and in turn lower the ability to fund investment.”⁸¹ These states use all of their resource revenues to encompass their populations and the profit from subsidized goods is not substantial enough to support economic well being. In a nation dependent on the cycle of cooption “a socio-economic-political system develops that rewards rent-seeking...more than productive activities.”⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 430.

⁸¹ Ibid., 434.

⁸² Ibid., 443.

Individual innovation is not valued in a society in which the government provides many basic goods and services for its citizens. The rentier state is by definition an inefficient system because much more is spent as an input to the system than is produced.

The problem of an unproductive economy constantly plagues the rentier system, whether in times of market surplus or downturn. When oil revenues decrease there is a tendency to avoid reform because experimentation may cause more economic losses. However, when revenues increase there is no sense of urgency for change in rentier economies.⁸³ As a result of this self-reinforcing system, there is no incentive for citizens or institutions to foster change, in either politics or the economy. For the future, “without real economic development and significantly broader political participation accountability for poor efficiency, periods of relatively low oil prices are likely to generate painful political and economic stresses in the Gulf region.”⁸⁴ Reform is desperately needed in order to form a more sustainable state; however the rentier systems that exist will not begin to change as long as their rulers can continue to hold onto the power they hold over their populations.

Effects of the Rentier State on Domestic Affairs

The rentier system in general favors certain institutions that function within the state. There are two main centers of power in this type of Middle Eastern regime: the first is the military, which is “the central fount of official power and the primary institution that supplie[s] the leaders and top officials of the state.”⁸⁵ Given its control over the means of violence belonging to the state, the support of the military is crucial to any

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 445.

⁸⁵ Mehran Kamrava and Frank O. Mora, "Civil Society and Democratization in Comparative Perspective: Latin America and the Middle East," *Third World Quarterly* 19, no. 5 (December 1998): 905.

regime that wishes to suppress any dissidents. The second center of control lies in official power, which is “designed to balance the repression of the military with popular mobilisation and mass political inclusion.”⁸⁶ Having two sources of power allows the regime to pit them against each other and mitigate the threat of a coup while still gaining support from both of these groups. These groups receive much of the regime’s rent and block potential reforms from happening. While it is advantageous for the regime to utilize these two centers of power to solidify their rule, these groups prevent change because they benefit from the status quo.

Military power is crucial to the survival of rentier states, but often the militaries of these nations are not allowed to function at their full capacity. GCC militaries are fragmented because “similar to some of the Arab republican regimes, ruling elites have historically built up rival security forces as an ‘army to watch the army’ to reduce the risks of a military takeover.”⁸⁷ Rentier states have continued funding their militaries in this manner in order to solidify their power, but these nations do not wish for the armed forces to become more powerful than the state itself. Specifically in GCC states, “ruling elites have at important instances created parallel military institutions for the purpose of satisfying the ambitions of different members and factions of the ruling family.”⁸⁸ These multiple institutions require more of the state’s resources and do not increase the military strength of the country. The inefficiency of rentier states can be seen clearly in the process of both building and breaking down military strength.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 906.

⁸⁷ Steffen Hertog, "Rentier Militaries in the Gulf States: The Price of Coup-Proofing," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43 (2011):400.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

While all rentier states exhibit tendencies to keep their militaries prevalent but weak, the Gulf States have specific characteristics that separate them from other systems. In the Gulf, “military budgets are huge, the security forces often fragmented and shot through with informal patronage, and senior ranks include many members of the ruling families.”⁸⁹ Oil wealth allows these actions to continue because it allows the regime to spend huge sums of money on the military without cutting back subsidies or other welfare programs. While spending this money could improve the power of the military to a degree where it would rival that of the state, Gulf governments have ensured that their “armies have been kept deliberately weak and unprofessional.”⁹⁰ This practice would be unsustainable for states that need to derive their power from their population; however rentier economies are supported by the flow of external revenue that supports paying off a military system while still keeping it institutionally weak.

Middle Eastern nations have been found to have some of the weakest civil society systems in the world. The rentier state system could contribute to this pattern because civil society and political participation are not necessary for citizens to receive the goods and services that they desire. Despite the trend against civil society in rentier states, there is evidence that goes against popular logic in the region. Resource rich Kuwait has a strong civil society, referred to as the *diwaniyya*, which consists of regular gatherings of prominent men in homes to discuss social and public issues.⁹¹ Typically, a state with as much oil wealth as Kuwait would discourage civil society gatherings that might instigate calls for reform but the *diwaniyya* are not shut down by the state and continue to grow the fledgling civil society there. In contrast, Yemen does not receive much revenue from

⁸⁹ Ibid., 401.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Nonneman, “Rentiers and Autocrats,” 149.

sales of resources and is considered very primitive but has a very viable civil society.⁹²

The cases of Yemen and Kuwait detract from the argument that rentier states cannot support civil society organizations, although many Middle Eastern and rentier nations do not have any form of grassroots organizations that can be relied upon to discuss meaningful reforms.

Above all else, rentier states have shown a tendency to build up bureaucracies that they must then support and fund with their external rent. Recently, many regimes in the Middle East have brought forth extensive modernization campaigns and therefore big bureaucracies have been needed to execute the government's plans.⁹³ These bureaucratic systems are built up and filled with state employees who then become some of the biggest consumers of national rent. Typically, the institutions of the rentier state enable a bureaucracy in which "most of it [is] employed in the civil service, [and] also heavily dependent on the state and its pursuit of rentier economic policies."⁹⁴ The presence of such a system also detracts from any mobilization towards true reform because so many members of the population are receiving rent and benefitting from an inefficient and corrupt state. Rent enables the bureaucracy to grow to such a degree that it begins to drain the recourses of the state.

Rentierism: Mutually Exclusive with Democracy?

Civil society has been cited as a prerequisite for democratic transitions, but its presence in the Middle East has thus far been insignificant in terms of ushering in true reform. In general, "democratic transitions require two developments, one involving the

⁹² Ibid., 147.

⁹³ Kamrava, "Civil Society and Democratization in Comparative Perspective," 904.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 905.

state, the other society.”⁹⁵ The state cannot alone usher in lasting reform using a top-down approach, but society cannot force its will on an oppressive regime without any support from those at the top of the system. While civil society is imperative for democratic sentiment for growth, it “cannot by itself spark the overthrow of an authoritarian system and replace it with a democratic system.”⁹⁶ Rulers with enough control have the ability to suppress their populations and support from the regime for accountability and liberalization is needed for true change to occur. If the rentier system truly does prevent civil society from forming then these nations will forever be at a disadvantage in moving towards democracy.

Democracy has thus far eluded rentier states because the existing system favors the status quo and those in power have no incentive to reform. Conditions have remained largely the same throughout the past half century because “genuine democratization would threaten the interests both of the regime and of the bourgeoisie.”⁹⁷ Both those who benefit from the distribution of rent and those at the very top of the system would see a reduction in their wealth and power if liberalization began to occur. As a result of this major impediment to reform “an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the population at large is needed for democratization” to occur within the rentier system.⁹⁸ If both the rent-seeking bourgeoisie and the common citizens unite to call for change, the regime will not be able to ignore the voice of the people. Within the rentier system, one group alone cannot call for democratization and it remains to be seen whether or not reforms can be

⁹⁵ Ibid., 893.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 895.

⁹⁷ Nonneman, “Rentiers and Autocrats,” 145.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 146.

made to the system without the regime increasing its oppression or the bourgeoisie blocking change.

Historically, the rentier system has played out in Gulf States or other nations that suffer from the resource curse. Jordan exists as one of a few nations that are able to sustain the same system of rent and patronage without possessing any valuable natural resources. Foreign aid and remittances provide the regime with the ability to co-opt its own people without having to rely on global oil prices. The downside of this type of quasi-rentier state is that the Jordanian government is completely dependent upon the nations that provide substantial amounts of aid. Any type of disturbance in world economic markets, such as the most recent recession of 2009, greatly restricts the resources of nations such as Jordan. Furthermore, economic reforms that would bring Jordan into the global marketplace with a liberalized economy are rejected by the population because adhering to Western norms of fiscal and monetary police would require the regime to drastically cut back the subsidies and patronage networks that have been built up since its inception. Although Jordan does have all of the characteristics of a rentier state, it faces unique challenges as a result of the sources of its rent.

Jordan as a Unique Case of Rentierism

Jordan fits into the rentier state system as a nation that derives most of its revenue from external sources. In general, "elites in a rentier system seek to build a coalition that is often detrimental to long term economic growth."⁹⁹ By creating such a coalition, the rentier can continue to stay in power as long as it provides for the members of the elite. Since the creation of Jordan in the early twentieth century "the Hashemite rulers... have

⁹⁹ Anne Mariel Peters and Pete W. Moore, "Beyond Boom and Bust: External Rents, Durable Authoritarianism, and Institutional Adaptation in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44 (July 2009): 259, doi:10.1007/s12116-009-9053-0.

constructed a series of distributive institutions- usually at the expense of economic development- in order to maintain a highly disparate regime."¹⁰⁰ The government provides for the wealthiest elite group of people and the power it obtains from this group solidifies its standing. However, most of the population is excluded from the tremendous benefits that the elite group reaps and is left without a way to voice their grievances because the nation lacks the institutions that foster political and social change.

Since its inception, Jordan's monarchy has relied upon support from its tribal population as a cornerstone of regime security. Sharif Hussein ensured the stability of the fledgling nation by co-opting Bedouin tribesmen and turning them into a functioning military force.¹⁰¹ He was then able to secure the boundaries of the newly founded Transjordan and continue ruling over the population. In order to win the allegiance of these nomadic tribes, Sharif Hussein had to provide them with valuable goods and services. Native Jordanians have remained invaluable to the stability of the Hashemite family. Over the years, the regime's liberalization efforts have centered on actions that can solidify support from core groups of both TransJordanians from the East Bank, as well as the local business community.¹⁰² Both of these groups provide the popular support that the regime needs in order to stay in power. Therefore, government actions are often based around providing additional benefits to these two demographic classes.

The regime's reliance on tribal support can be traced back to before the Hashemite family even gained control of Transjordan. In the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, Auda ibn Tayi states that the Turks give him money to subdue his tribe so that they will not attack

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 257.

¹⁰¹ *History of Jordanian Military Accomplishments*, 1989, Martyr's Memorial National Military Museum, Amman, Jordan.

¹⁰² Scott Greenwood, "Jordan's 'New Bargain:' The Political Economy of Regime Security," *The Middle East Journal* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 249.

passing caravans. In this system, the tribal leaders are given money to subdue their tribe and they keep some of the money for themselves while giving the rest to tribesmen.¹⁰³ At first the Turks used this system to ensure the safety of caravans and the Hashemite family has continued the practice of giving benefits to tribal leaders to ensure their loyalty to the government. In order to preserve the stability of the government, tribal leaders needed to be given an incentive not to revolt. As the system has progressed, tribes have continued to provide necessary support for the Hashemite family and their loyalty is ensured by the benefits they reap from external rent.

As a rentier state, Jordan provides both of these groups with benefits not available to all social classes. While the TransJordanian elite are rewarded with "public jobs and subsidies", the business class is given "regulatory protection and state contracts."¹⁰⁴ The regime is able to co-opt both of these groups by granting them special privileges and giving them advantages in the workforce. External rents that the Jordanian government receives enable it to spend the money on these expensive programs. However, when faced with an economic downturn, the regime must adjust its reforms so as to continue to appease the population. When the government finds that it can no longer afford to win support from its people through economic rewards, it must instead reform its political and social institutions in order to maintain power.

¹⁰³Yusuf Mansur, interview by author, Enconsult office, March 13, 2012.

¹⁰⁴Greenwood, "Jordan's New Bargain," 251.

United States Economic Aid to Jordan since the 1991 Gulf Crisis

(\$ in millions)

Fiscal Year (FY)	Economic Assistance				Military Assistance		Totals
	EconSpt	Food	Devel	PeaceCp	FMF	IMET	
1991	35.0 ^a	0	0	0	20.0 ^a	1.3	56.30
1992	30.0 ^b	20.0	0	0	20.0 ^b	.6	70.60
1993 ^c	5.0	30.0	0	0	9.0	.5	44.50
1994 ^d	9.0	15.0	4.0	0	9.0	.8	37.80
1995	7.2	15.0	6.7	0	7.3	1.0	37.20
1996	7.2	21.0	7.9	0	200.0 ^e	1.2	237.30
1997 ^f	112.2	2.6	4.5	1.1	30.0	1.7	152.10
1998 ^f	150.0	0	0	1.2	75.0 ^g	1.6	227.80
1999	150.0	0	0	1.4	70.0 ^g	1.6	223.00
1999 (Wye)	50.0	0	0	0	50.0	0	100.00
2000	150.0	0	0	1.7	75.0	1.6	228.30
2000 (Wye)	50.0	0	0	0	150.0	0	200.00 ^h
2001	150.0	0	0	1.7	75.0	1.7	228.40
2002	150.0	0	0	1.6	75.0	2.0	228.60
2002 (Suppl.)	100.0	0	0	0	25.0	0	125.00
2003	250.0	0	0	1.0	198.0	2.4	451.40
2003 (Suppl.)	700.0	0	0	0	406.0	0	1,106.00
2004	250.0	0	0	2.3	206.0	2.9	461.20
2004 (Suppl.)	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	100.00
2005	250.0	0	0	1.6	206.0	3.0	460.60
2005 (Suppl.)	100.0	0	0	0	100.0	0	200.00
2006	247.5	0	0	1.6	207.9	3.0	460.00
2006 (Suppl.)	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	50.00
2007	245.0	0	0	0	206.0	3.1	454.10
2007 (Suppl.)	10.3	0	0	0	45.0	0	55.30 ⁱ
2008	361.4	0	0	0	298.3	2.9	662.60
2008 (Suppl.)	200.0	0	0	0	50.0	0	250.00
2009	263.5	0	0	0	235.0	3.1	501.60
2009 (Suppl.)	150.0	0	0	0	(150.0 in FY2010 Advanced funding)	0	150.00
2010	363.0	0	0	0	300.0	3.8	666.8
2010 (Suppl.)	100.0	0	0	0	50.0	0	150.00
2011	362.0	0	0	0	299.4	3.7	665.1
FY2012 (Estimate)	460.0	0	0	0	300.0	3.7	763.7
FY2013 (Request)	360.0	0	0	0	300.0	3.8	663.8

Notes: These figures do not include debt relief subsidy appropriations, food aid between 1999-2006, or amounts for de-mining assistance and counter-terrorism assistance.

- a. Suspended in April 1991 under P.L. 102-27; released in early 1993.
- b. Released in late July 1993.
- c. Restrictions on FY1993 funds waived by Presidential Determination (PD) 93-39, Sept. 17, 1993.
- d. FY1994 funds released by PD 94-11, Jan. 13, 1994, waiving restrictions under P.L. 103-87.
- e. Three components: \$30 million (Administration's original request); \$70 million in additional FMF under FY1996 appropriation (P.L. 104-134) to cover balance of F-16 aircraft package; and \$100 million in special drawdown authority (P.L. 104-107).
- f. These figures include \$100 million in economic assistance under the President's Middle East Peace and Stability Fund (\$100 million in FY1997, \$116 million in FY1998).
- g. For each of these two years, FMF figure includes \$25 million in drawdown authority.
- h. Some of these funds were obligated in later years (FY2001 or FY2002).
- i. Total FY2007 supplemental aid to Jordan was \$85.3 million. The above chart does not include \$25 million in NADR funds.

Jordan has been consistently plagued by a lack of political participation as a result of the rent seeking channels that make public opinion insignificant. While much of the political apathy in the kingdom is a result of the population's frustration with the policies of the regime, there are many definitive legal hurdles that any potential political party must endure in order to attempt to participate in the system. "According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, only 14 of Jordan's 36 political parties were able to comply with stiff new regulations that went into effect in 2007. They included obtaining certificates of government support and an increase in minimum party membership from 50 to 500. For various reasons, eight of the opposition coalition's 14 parties couldn't comply with the new protocols and had to be dissolved."¹⁰⁵ The blatant lack of diversity in the political parties that are allowed to operate within the boundaries of the rentier state is a direct result of the restrictions placed on all expressions of public opinion. While citizens may wish to find alternative methods of asserting their views, they are often prevented from organizing by laws protecting the status quo.

Jordan's Foreign Policy as Related to the Rentier State

The rentier system in Jordan is inherently opposed to any kind of democratization measures. In order for this type of government to maintain its monopoly on power, "the search for some form of legitimacy must be at the core of every regime-survival strategy."¹⁰⁶ Rentierism can only survive as long as the core group of elites is supported economically, and therefore Jordan's foreign policy has come to rely on the regime securing rent from external sources. Especially in today's international political climate,

¹⁰⁵ Karen Leigh, "Jordan's King Holds On."

¹⁰⁶ Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger, "Waiting for Godot: Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East," *International Political Science Review* 25, no. 4 (October 2004): 373, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601605>.

“talking the donor talk [has become] a prerequisite for political rent-seeking.”¹⁰⁷ Jordan’s leaders are constantly making foreign policy decisions based on which choice will bring more money into the country. Whether a decision is made in order to receive more foreign aid, trade agreements, or easier access to loans, the government continues to focus their efforts on obtaining more rent instead of improving the lives of citizens or moving towards true liberalization and reform.

Jordanian foreign policy is intrinsically intertwined with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Following the first influx of Palestinians into Jordan in 1948, King Hussein granted citizenship to all of these refugees and allowed them to carry Jordanian passports. The status of these refugees remains a heated political issue even today because Jordan receives huge amounts of aid for hosting all of these people. In 1986, King Hussein launched an economic development plan for the Occupied Territories.¹⁰⁸ While this may have initially seemed like a magnanimous gesture by the king, it was in reality a political move in order to get more aid from the international community. This development plan intended to improve the conditions of Palestinian refugees so that they would continue to reside in the Occupied Territories and therefore Jordan would continue to receive aid from the international community to support them.¹⁰⁹ King Hussein utilized the conflict to the west of Jordan to his advantage and secured more aid to sustain the rentier system as a result.

Direct aid from the oil producing Gulf States makes up a significant portion of the Jordanian budget. The rentier state in Jordan relies is economically vulnerable because of

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 376.

¹⁰⁸Malik Mufti, "A King's Art: Dynastic Ambition and State Interest in Hussein's Jordan," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 13, no. 3 (August 2002): 8, doi:10.1080/714000336.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 9.

its lack of natural resources and therefore must rely on the export of goods and services, as well as direct financial assistance, from Gulf States. While at the beginning of the 1980s, money flowing into Jordan from remittances and Gulf aid totaled two billion dollars a year, out of a four billion dollar gross domestic product.¹¹⁰ This flow of money, however, remains vulnerable to fluctuations in the oil market. In 1989, the oil shock had finally affected Jordan to the point where King Hussein had to reach out to the International Monetary Fund in order to obtain financial assistance. By making this step, he was forced to implement fiscal austerity measures and adhere to the guidelines of the Washington Consensus.¹¹¹ These measures were contrary to the interests of the rentier state because they reduced the ability of the regime to co-opt its people. While economic conditions forced the king to rely on a new external source of rent, the end result of this decision was damaging to the power of the political elites. The money that was given to Jordan as a result of the IMF structural adjustment plan did help to sustain the regime, but the backlash from the population following the implementation of fiscal austerity measures hurt the authority of the government.

Another foreign policy move made by King Hussein during the 1980s was the creation of the Arab Cooperation Council. This move followed the end of the Iran-Iraq War and was meant to facilitate capital and labor flows between Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen.¹¹² This agreement was intended to accelerate the money coming into Jordan, both from remittances and direct aid. While this agreement fell apart after the First Gulf War, its creation shows the importance of securing these sources of external rent. In order

¹¹⁰Ibid., 4.

¹¹¹ Yom, "The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability," 45.

¹¹²Curtis R Ryan, "Jordan First," 52.

for the regime to survive, it needs to constantly be receiving external rent, which it can then use to further co-opt the population.

Jordan has traditionally relied on Iraq as a source of cheap oil. This economic relationship became controversial when Saddam Hussein lost favor with the international community. Tensions between Saddam and the West came to a head in 1990 during the First Gulf War, when a U.S.-led international coalition attacked in order to push Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. Jordan was hesitant in supporting the coalition, and King Hussein's lack of action resulted in a severe cut to the aid Jordan received from the West. Following this foreign policy misstep, "Jordanian government officials remain[ed] wary of future such diplomatic- and more importantly *economic*- rifts with external benefactors."¹¹³ Without the external rent in the form of foreign aid, the rentier system could not continue to support the political elites. After the First Gulf War, Jordan's leaders were careful not to oppose actions of the West for fear of losing these funds.

Immediately following Jordan's fall from grace in the eyes of the international community, King Hussein revived the standing of his country by putting his efforts into alleviating the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1994, Jordan signed an independent peace treaty with Israel and was quickly rewarded by an influx of aid into the country. This was beneficial to the regime because "the intromission of such international support lowered the cost of domestic repression and fulfilled key political needs."¹¹⁴ Peace with Israel meant that the United States "and its allies delivered mounting flows of economic aid and security assistance to Amman."¹¹⁵ Jordan could now rely on a substantial flow of aid from the West because it had made peace with Israel. In return, the regime could utilize

¹¹³Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁴ Yom, "The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability," 40.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 42.

this money to continue its policies of cooption with the people and maintain their monopoly on power.

Peace with Israel also gave Jordan indirect economic benefits. Instead of being in a constant state of war with its neighbors, Jordan now had access to more commercial activities than ever before. These economic benefits included “more tourism; a few joint projects; perhaps the cancellation of debts to some industrialized countries...[and] a more equitable sharing of water.”¹¹⁶ All of these benefits provided the regime with more tools to satisfy both the ruling elite and the general population. Water especially provided a valuable benefit to the regime because it allowed the government to distribute water to the population and win the favor of the people while continuing to deny true political representation.

When King Abdullah ascended to the throne, he continued his father’s policies of foreign actions based upon securing external rent. Jordan continued to support the United States following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. As a reward for supporting the West against terrorism, the U.S. doubled its aid package to Jordan and both countries signed a free trade agreement.¹¹⁷ The king himself travelled to Washington to meet with President Bush in order to secure the free trade agreement between these two nations. Exports from Jordan to the U.S. rose from 18 million in 1998 to one billion by 2009, greatly raising the revenue flowing into Jordan.¹¹⁸ These additional funds allowed the regime to continue to subvert public opinion by providing goods and services desired by the population. During this time period the government expenditures increased while the

¹¹⁶ Mufti, “A King’s Art,” 5.

¹¹⁷ Ryan, “Jordan First,” 54.

¹¹⁸ King Abdullah II, *Our Last Best Chance: The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril* (London: Penguin Group, 2011), 167-8.

“rift between state and society was...steadily growing.”¹¹⁹ The Jordanian people remained marginally disenfranchised by the rentier system receiving substantial amounts of external rent in reward for its pro-West policies.

Working with the West to combat terrorism was a calculated play made by many Arab regimes. By joining the fight against extremism, these nations “could suppress domestic opposition in the name of combating terrorism without raising serious Western concerns.”¹²⁰ Jordan and other Middle Eastern nations were able to still win support in the form of American aid by taking steps to catch terrorists. However, in doing so, these nations were also allowed to suppress public opinion under the guise of national security. The war against terrorism benefitted the Jordanian rentier state because the regime was able to secure more aid as a result of its pivotal location in the Middle East.

King Abdullah did not stop at placating Western powers to obtain external rent. He began by focusing on Jordan’s relations with the oil-wealthy Iraq. Although Iraq still had an embargo on its goods according to the United Nations, Jordan broke this embargo and sent medical supplies and “high-level government delegations to Baghdad.”¹²¹ This move enabled Jordan to get back in Saddam’s good graces and therefore continue to secure cheap oil from a nearby source. As a resource poor nation, Jordan is forced to rely on these external rents in order to maintain the rentier system. By reaching out to Iraq, King Abdullah was once again able to utilize foreign policy to maintain the stability of the Jordanian system.

Having learned its lesson from the First Gulf War, Jordan did not dare to oppose the actions of America during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. While King Hussein had chosen

¹¹⁹ Ryan, “Jordan First,” 54.

¹²⁰ Albrecht, “Waiting for Godot,” 377.

¹²¹ Ryan, “Jordan First,” 53.

to stay out of the international coalition in 1990, King Abdullah made Jordan “a logistical linchpin for the Iraqi invasion, providing over-flight to American combat jets and hosting thousands of Western military personnel.”¹²² Although public sentiment sided with Iraq during this period of time, the Jordanian government chose to repress the will of the people once again and support the cause that would bring them the most foreign revenue. Jordan was then further rewarded by a one billion dollar grant in 2003 to compensate for the costs incurred during the Iraqi invasion.¹²³ As a result of his foreign policy decisions, King Abdullah was able to further strengthen the power of the regime.

Although Jordan possesses few natural resources, it is still able to sustain a rentier system on the external rents it receives. Remittances, foreign aid, and commercial deals all contribute to the total rent that the regime needs to survive and therefore the Jordanian government must focus its efforts on securing more and more aid. In terms of foreign policy, Jordan is able to ally itself both with the West, as well as with its Arab neighbors in order to bring in more money. By supporting Western endeavors in the Middle East, as well as maintaining good relations in the region, Jordan can have its cake and eat it too in terms of foreign financial assistance. The money brought in is used to continuously subvert the will of the people and sustain the desires of the ruling political elite.

There have been, of course, groups that have challenged the authority of the rentier system throughout its history. Whether it was the Palestinian guerrillas of the 1970s or the Muslim Brotherhood today, the Jordanian government has withstood numerous threats to its sovereignty. As opposed to the PLO leaders who wished to take control of Jordan in order to bolster their cause against Israel, the Muslim Brotherhood

¹²²Yom, “The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability,” 50-51.

¹²³Ibid., 52.

has appeared as a modern day opponent that is focused on undermining the foundations of the rentier state. While the true intentions of the Islamist groups in Jordan will not be seen until they are allowed to hold a substantial position within the government, it is certain that their presence through various social and educational programs has caused the regime great anxiety. In providing an alternative method of distributing the goods and services that the rentier state wishes to hold a monopoly over, the Muslim Brotherhood and its political parties have achieved the status of being the only true opposition to the regime.

Islamist Influence within the Rentier State

Growing Islamist influence across the Middle East has raised questions about the intentions of these groups and their social and political goals. While many of these organizations appear to support democracy, their aim of promoting a more Islamic society causes concern from many Western nations. Within the rentier system that the Jordanian regime has cultivated, Islamists represent the only viable opposition group that is allowed to function in the political system. While the Muslim Brotherhood has acted within the existing institutions in Jordan up to this point in time, its members have consistently been blocked from enacting any lasting reforms. The advent of the Arab Spring has highlighted the significance of Islamist groups around the region because of the strong grassroots support they receive from Arab populations. Islamists would play a definitive role in a post-rentier society in Jordan, whether this arises from revolution or gradual reform. The Muslim Brotherhood and its political organizations in Jordan have displayed the only sustainable opposition to the existing system and although their actions have not threatened the existing system up to this point in history, these groups will play a significant role if Jordan is to ever move away from rentierism.

Organized Islamist influence in the Middle East can be traced back to the advent of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna as a social organization but it has, over time, taken on a more political tone. In 1945 the organization spread to Jordan and has focused on reforming the political system from within since this time.¹²⁴ Today, the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front, are the main Islamist actors in Jordanian politics

¹²⁴ Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Islamists, the State, and Cooperation in Jordan," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 2.

and society.¹²⁵ These two complementary groups have utilized social organizations that provide goods and services to gain influence in society and currently exercise the most power of any opposition party.

The IAF does not, however, hold a monopoly on Islamist influence within the Jordanian sphere. The Islamic Centrist Party was founded in 2001 as a result of many IAF members either leaving or being expelled from the party in the aftermath of the Brotherhood's boycott of Jordanian parliamentary elections.¹²⁶ While the ICP does not exercise as much influence over politics as the far reaching actions of the IAF, its presence within the system shows the openness of Islamist parties in Jordan to accept democratic norms. Both of these two major parties have consistently worked towards a more Islamic society, but they have historically differed on social issues such as women's rights. Between these two parties, different social and political views are made available to the Jordanian public, even if the success of the Islamists as a whole in enacting lasting change has been questionable.

Islamist Power as a Social Organization Separate from the Regime

Islamist groups have been allowed to function in Jordan as a result of their social programs and the popularity of their religious message. The Islamic movement's "active involvement in welfare programs...widespread presence at mosques and other religious institutions make their role in Islamizing the public on social and moral issues almost uncontested" by other groups.¹²⁷ As a result of the fact that they function through social and not political outlets, Islamists are able to win favor with the population while not

¹²⁵ Glenn E. Robinson, "Can Islamists Be Democrats? The Case of Jordan," *Middle East Journal* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 374.

¹²⁶ Ibtisam Alatiyat and Hassan Barari, "Liberating Women with Islam? Islamists and Women's Issues in Jordan," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11, nos. 3-4 (2010): 372.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 359-360.

threatening the regime. Specifically the Brotherhood has concentrated its actions through Islamic nongovernmental organizations such as “schools, health care, religious lessons, and youth programs, all designed to promote Islamic values and behavior.”¹²⁸ These apolitical actions have allowed the Brotherhood to expand its influence throughout the kingdom without incurring government sanctions or other pejorative action.

Beyond simply gaining popularity with the Jordanian people, the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups have enjoyed privileged status with regard to the government that has translated into political successes. Its social actions have allowed the Islamist movement to avoid the restrictions that have been placed on political parties in Jordan and “not only was [the Brotherhood] permitted to organize when all other political organizations in the country were banned during the martial law period, but it has been allowed to expand the scope of its activities, broadening the reach of its appeal.”¹²⁹ Many of its actions are looked upon favorably by the regime because these social programs help segments of the population that would otherwise be unhappy with the ineffectiveness with many existing government programs. As a result, the Muslim Brotherhood has gained widespread popularity throughout Jordan without attracting negative attention from the government itself.

While Islamist actions in Jordan may have began as purely social programs, their popularity has aided their marginal political successes within the existing rentier system. One of the largest Brotherhood programs in Jordan has been the Islamic Center Charity Society. Although this and other Islamist programs do “not directly engage in politics, there is a political effect. Beneficiaries provide political support to the Brotherhood

¹²⁸ Wiktorowicz, “Islamists, the State, and Cooperation,” 7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

because of its social services.”¹³⁰ The popular support that the Brotherhood has built up over the last century in Jordan has translated into political successes when parliamentary and municipal candidates associated with the IAF run for office. Although political parties have been banned for many years in Jordan, Islamist candidates are able to run for their organization unofficially because of the reputable social programs run by the Brotherhood.

Additionally, the Islamist movement has gained traction with the population by remaining an organization that does not receive rent from the regime. When King Hussein outlawed political parties in the 1950s, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to continue its social interactions with the population while other organizations ceased to operate. During this ban, Brotherhood members were rewarded for their loyalty to the regime through King Hussein “appointing them as government ministers, particularly of the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with a policy of repressing other political forces in the Kingdom.”¹³¹ Islamists were then able to influence social policy from within the regime during a period of time when all other parties were blocked from operating. When parties granted the ability to function within the political system with the liberalization measures of 1989, the Muslim Brotherhood found itself in a much better position to win seats in parliament than any of the other fledgling parties.¹³² Their considerable influence since this point in time is no doubt a result of the favorable treatment they received from the regime during the ban on political parties.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹³¹ Janine A. Clark, "The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking Cross-Ideological Cooperation in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38 (2006): 546.

¹³² Ibid.

Following these political liberalization measures, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to exercise the most power of any organization, even if the regime still restricted all opposition parties. Once in power, Islamists were able to join together with liberals and leftists and “sit together in opposition blocs and coordinate activities against the state.”¹³³ While the government still blocked any true reform to the system, an opposition voice led by the IAF represented the strongest challenge to regime authority. Many of these opposition groups did not have many common goals beyond their disagreements with the government. “Their ability to unite under a common banner masked real divisions within and between” the two main demographic groups in Jordan, the East Bank Jordanians and the Palestinians.¹³⁴ Islamists may represent the most formidable opposition to the regime, but their power remains marginalized by inherent divisions among political parties.

Historical Influence in Politics

Liberalization measures taken by King Hussein in 1989 greatly altered the political landscape in Jordan. Islamists achieved favorable election results during this year because they were able to function as a welfare society and therefore spread their message horizontally in the wake of the ban on political parties. Furthermore, they presented an organized, highly disciplined group of only 30 candidates instead of other secular groups with more than 700 candidates.¹³⁵ The social welfare programs that were allowed to operate within the constraints of the ban on political parties had given the Islamists the popular support that they needed in order to win seats when parties were allowed to run for office. Concrete results showed that “the fact that the Muslim Brothers

¹³³ Ibid., 539.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 543.

¹³⁵ Linda Shull Adams, "Political Liberalization of Jordan: An Analysis of the State's Relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood," *Journal of Church and State* 38, no. 3 (1996): 511.

were the only established political grouping in Jordan” in fact allowed Islamists to win 32 of the 80 available seats in the 1989 parliamentary elections.¹³⁶ This represented a considerable victory for the Brotherhood and provided Islamists with the power that they needed to bring up social change within the existing political system. Islamist candidates won these seats legally and their welfare programs enabled them to obtain the popularity that was necessary to give a plurality in parliament to an opposition group.

Although Islamist candidates gained the plurality they needed to enact reform in 1989, they were blocked from taking any actions that challenged the authority of the regime. Islamists lost favor with the regime after they began to openly oppose actions of the government in calling attention to government corruption and attempting to indict former Prime Minister Zayid al-Rifai.¹³⁷ King Hussein perceived these actions as a threat to his power and the power of the regime as a whole and he began to step back on his liberalization measures. The number of Islamist members in parliament dropped from 32 to 22 in 1993 because the rules of the game were “legally ‘managed’” by the regime before elections took place.¹³⁸ These actions were taken openly by the regime and restricted the popularity of political parties because the one-man one-vote electoral law that was adopted by the Jordanian government caused tribal affiliations to dictate the outcome of elections. Political parties and Islamist candidates could not win votes over tribal candidates when the public was forced to only have one vote. Utilizing strictly measures kept the regime from suffering at the hands of their actions and allowed them to restrict the political power of Islamists and other opposition parties.

¹³⁶ Robinson, “Can Islamists Be Democrats,” 374.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 381.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 376.

Islamist Actions with Regard to the Women's Movement

Islamist organizations in Jordan have a strong track record of rhetoric supporting women's rights and women's roles in public life. Specifically, IAF's electoral platform in 2007 supported an active public role for women.¹³⁹ The more moderate ICP announced a positive opinion of a women's quota in Jordanian politics.¹⁴⁰ This quota would have enabled women to win seats in parliament in areas where they previously could not garner the public support to win. Both of these statements by Islamist parties have shown theoretical support for women's rights in a traditionally male dominated political system, but neither organization has taken concrete steps to elevate the position of women in politics.

While Islamist organizations have not revealed themselves as the best advocates of women's rights, their actions have remained ambiguous on this issue. The Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP) is dominated by Islamist parties and specifically the "IAF is very proud of its participation in the HCCNOP and claims that it is a democratic model for the Arab world."¹⁴¹ IAF actions within this organization have shown the rhetoric of the Islamist party pan out on the political front. Islamists have used their power in the HCCNOP in order to take all other measures besides the moderately effective women's quota off of the negotiating table. The official reasoning for these actions was that the women's quota, unlike more controversial issues such as citizenship and divorce, was not an issue that was mandated by Islam.¹⁴² This lack of enthusiasm on the part of Islamists regarding women's rights

¹³⁹ Alatiyat, "Liberating Women with Islam," 369.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 368.

¹⁴¹ Clark, "Conditions of Islamist Moderation," 539.

¹⁴² Ibid., 554.

has contradicted descriptions of Islamist organizations as embracing democracy. If the IAF and the ICP were to follow through on their declarations of support for the women's movement in Jordan they could truly be portrayed as moderate, liberal organizations.

Islamists have also utilized anti-Western sentiment to justify their actions against women's rights. The IAF opposed both a divorce law and an honor crimes law that would have given women more rights in Jordan. Their reasoning for doing so remains ambiguous, however, "publicly, the IAF aligned their objections to the laws within a larger context of the regime's Western, secular vision for Jordan in contrast to the Arab, Islamic identity that the IAF presumably is defending; in doing so, it was supported by many tribal MPs."¹⁴³ Even though Islamic law grants women with more rights regarding divorce than Jordanian secular law currently does, the IAF was able to justify the repression of women's rights by masking their opinions behind anti-Western sentiment. Even the more moderate ICP has balked at providing women with more rights. The ICP wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in 2010 calling for a retreat from the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on the grounds that the convention conflicted with Islam's view of the complementary roles of men and women in society and that CEDAW promoted a foreign agenda.¹⁴⁴ Public sentiment against foreign intervention in Jordanian affairs is so strong that Islamist organizations are sure to find support for any of their actions if they are justified as actions against foreign intervention. Islamist actions in favor of and against the women's movement have remained unclear in the political system because these any

¹⁴³ Ibid.,551.

¹⁴⁴ Alatiyat, "Liberating Women with Islam", 363.

concrete stance taken by these parties is masked behind a veil of nationalism and Islamic pride over secular values.

Islamist Actions with Regard to Democracy

While Islamists are often associated with theocratic governments across the Middle East, the organizations that exist within Jordan have openly supported democracy. Historically, “the Islamist movement in Jordan has been consistently in the forefront of democratizing the Jordanian polity since liberalization began in 1989.”¹⁴⁵ Regardless of whether or not Islamist organizations truly support a representative government, they have proven themselves able to act within a democratic system over the past thirty years. The amount of seats that the IAF won in the 1989 elections showed exactly how “Jordan’s Islamists have proved themselves to be capable democrats, obeying the rules of the political game while parlaying their strength in society into a parliamentary plurality.”¹⁴⁶ By acting within the existing system, Islamists were able to win their political power legally and begin to act upon the statements they had been making in favor of reform.

Beyond simply supporting democracy at its initial stages, Islamist groups in Jordan have always demonstrated their commitment to representative government and their willingness to work within existing political boundaries. Some Middle Eastern Islamists support democracy only to achieve a position of power and then shift positions to maintaining an Islamic theocracy, but “Jordanian Islamists are careful to link Islam with democracy itself.”¹⁴⁷ Basic tenants of Islam support democracy and, unlike some fundamentalist groups in the Middle East, the IAF has not reneged on its initial efforts at

¹⁴⁵ Robinson, “Can Islamists Be Democrats,” 374.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 386.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 378.

working within a republic. Furthermore, “despite its advocacy of a more Islamic society, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has never sought a radical or revolutionary change in political arrangements that would threaten the survival of the regime.”¹⁴⁸ Islamist support for democracy in a way that does not fundamentally challenge the stability of the monarchy has aided the IAF and the ICP in remaining politically relevant without being restrained by government limitations.

While Islamist groups have supported the liberalization process in Jordan, they are often given advantages over other opposition groups by the government itself. “In Jordan, the regime benefits from Muslim Brotherhood success because as a moderate reform movement it checks other more confrontational social movements and channels Islamic activism into a non-violent agenda.”¹⁴⁹ This Islamist group functions as an opposition group that still supports the existence of the monarchy and this has allowed them to become the favored opposition group. The Muslim Brotherhood has been given privileged status by the government because they countered both pan-Arab leftists and the extreme right-wing Islamists that opposed the regime.¹⁵⁰ Most other opposition groups have historically disagreed with fundamental decisions of the monarchy and they have therefore been blocked from voicing their opinions while the Muslim Brotherhood has continued to be able to operate within the regime. As long as these groups continue to abide by the rules of the game, they are not considered to be serious threats to the government and their moderate opposition is utilized by the king to show his support of a representative system.

¹⁴⁸ Wiktorowicz, “Liberating Women with Islam,” 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Robinson, “Can Islamists Be Democrats,” 380.

Islamist Relations with Rent-seeking Groups

The extent to which the Islamists have been able to function within the rentier system has been heavily dependent upon the relationships between these groups and other rent-seeking organizations. In the beginning, “the movement [had] been led by established East Bank families, traditionally a primary source of support for the Hashemites [which meant that] the regime [could] crack down on the Islamist elements, but not very hard.”¹⁵¹ While the East Bankers represent a minority of the Jordanian population, they hold the majority of the political power in the country and the regime has avoided upsetting this group for fear that it will damage the legitimacy of the government itself. The fact that many East Bankers support a transition to a more Islamic society has meant that these two groups have been intrinsically linked in the political process.

Despite the original outpouring of support from powerful groups within the rentier state, Islamists have not remained in a privileged position with regard to the regime. A changing of demographic support for the Islamists caused them to lose favor with the regime in the beginning of the 1990s. Their support began to come from the younger, poorer segments of society, as well as from the Palestinian portion of the population. None of these new areas of demographic support receive rent from the regime and cannot exercise as much power as the East Bankers.¹⁵² As a direct result of the shift in demographic support for Islamists, the regime has been less inclined to allow Islamist power to continue to grow. Palestinian support for the Islamists has certainly not been as valuable as the initial East Bank support for these fledgling political parties.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 381.

¹⁵² Ibid., 383.

Although the base of support for Islamist groups has shifted to a segment of the population that does not receive rent from the regime, these political parties have maintained their good standing with the regime. Specifically the IAF has been considered as “loyal opposition” because the Muslim Brotherhood acts through existing “institutions of the political system.”¹⁵³ As opposed to a more radical group that would act to overthrow the monarchy and make significant changes to parliament, the IAF is favored as a group that can prove the regime’s commitment to democracy without pushing for true change within the system. Historically, “the Jordanian movement has enjoyed a relatively cordial and cooperative relationship with the Hashemite monarchy” and has been able to expand their influence as a result of the preferential treatment they are given by the regime.¹⁵⁴ This positive relationship has allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to continue its civil society activities and gain even more popular support. Islamist groups are the only opposition groups who have been allowed to maintain and even expand their actions without facing restrictive action from the regime and as a result they have emerged as the strongest opposition group in Jordan.

Islamists and the Arab Spring

Popular uprisings throughout the Middle East appeared to usher in a wave of democracy beginning in January 2011. Since that time it has remained unclear whether or not these protests were fueled by Islamist sentiment or secular, democratic motives. At the current time, the Middle East is “experiencing a resurgence of Islamic activism fueled by rampant poverty, increasing unemployment and underemployment, as well as

¹⁵³ Wiktorowicz, “Liberating Women with Islam,” 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

disillusion with secular rule and Western influence.”¹⁵⁵ Whether or not this wave of protests will bring positive change to the region, it is certain that that the “the Arab Spring...has accelerated this reactionary Islamist trend.”¹⁵⁶ Islamist groups elsewhere in the Middle East may be more radical than in Jordan, but the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood as a whole will undoubtedly impact the future successes of Islamist parties in the kingdom.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, “Political Liberalization of Jordan,” 508.

¹⁵⁶ John R. Bradley, *After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York 2012.

Can Jordan's Rentierism Survive the Arab Spring?

In the spring of 2012, a wave of protests rippled through the Middle East and destabilized some of the most entrenched regimes in the region. Beginning in Tunisia, this series of revolts then spread to Egypt, Libya, and Syria. While these revolutionary events occurred mainly in Arab republics, even the monarchies were not spared from the popular sentiment calling for more representation. Shortly after the first wave of protests began, Jordan began to experience public calls for political and economic reform. Groups traditionally loyal to the regime, such as the East Bank Jordanians, even joined in the protests and caused concern for the overall stability of the state. The regime has largely resorted to its traditional methods of handling discontent, including increasing subsidies, cutting taxes, and changing ministers in order to quiet the calls for reform and even revolution. While in the short term these tactics have helped to push back against the tide of protests, they have not solved the underlying economic and political problems facing the Hashemite Kingdom. As long as these issues remain the regime will not be stable and the popular discontent with the rentier state's exclusive policies will continue to grow.

The Arab Spring in a Jordanian Context

When compared with the turmoil that has engulfed the Middle East in the past fifty years, Jordan has stood out as a relatively stable entity that maintained cordial relations with all of its neighbors. In 1992, Jordan achieved the highest ever Freedom House score for an Arab country. However, it appears that its liberalization measures peaked during this year as well.¹⁵⁷ In conjunction with mandated World Bank privatization measures in the 1990s, the Jordanian regime has restricted many civil

¹⁵⁷ Shadi Hamid and Courtney Freer, "How Stable is Jordan? King Abdullah's Half-Hearted Reforms and the Challenge of the Arab Spring," *The Brookings Institution*, November 2011, 1.

liberties in order to maintain the power of the government. Under the current system, Jordan has “one of the region’s weakest political party systems and one of its most unrepresentative parliaments” in addition to completely excluding opposition members from the last parliament.¹⁵⁸ While these conditions would have sparked protests much earlier than the spring of 2011, the foreign aid given to the rentier system allowed its stability to continue much longer than would have been sustainable without generous external donors.

The Jordanian government has been able to avoid criticism of its lack of popular representation because of its status as the sole stable Western ally in the Middle East. Jordanian “authorities retain several assets: popular anxiety about instability; U.S. and Gulf Arab political and material support; and persistent intercommunal divisions within the opposition.”¹⁵⁹ This combination of conditions blocking reform has allowed the rentier state in Jordan to survive various political and economic crises since its inception. Even the most dissatisfied citizens under the regime would not have wanted the country to fall into chaos and therefore they held back their opposition to the regime. Foreign donors relied upon Jordan as a key ally in the region and therefore continued to fund the rentier state’s activities. Finally, divisions between the two main groups of the population, the East Bankers and the Palestinian-Jordanians, prevented a unified opposition group from surfacing. While the regime may have experienced temporary periods of turmoil, all of these conditions have allowed it to continue the rentier policies that have existed since its inception.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, *Popular Protest in Africa and the Middle East (IX): Dallying with Reform in a Divided Jordan*, report no. 118 (n.p.: n.p., 2012), i.

When protests erupted in Egypt and Tunisia in the spring of 2011, Jordan was not safe from the wave of popular discontent sweeping through the region. The first protests in Jordan were recorded on 25 March 2011, about a month after Egypt's protests had reached critical mass and become a true revolt.¹⁶⁰ While these protests took longer to begin than in other Arab nations, the implications were just as severe for the regime. Protesters gathered largely in the urban areas of Amman and demonstrated against high taxes, the rising price of commodities and the lack of jobs.¹⁶¹ All of these problems were and continue to be economic issues plaguing the Jordanian population, and the Arab Spring brought forth an opportunity to attempt to significantly reform the system. At this point in time, it was unclear whether Jordan would remain a stable entity amid turmoil in the Middle East, or whether these protests would spur on a revolt against the government.

Historically, the East Bank Jordanians had represented the foundation of power for the rentier state. Traditionally Jordanians of East Bank descent had supported the regime because they were given “over-representation in the public sector, the security services, and...parliament.”¹⁶² However, their position of power was threatened when privatization measures were implemented in the 1990s and suddenly this group began to find the suggestions of Islamist opposition groups more appealing than the tactics of the regime. These building tensions between the regime and the East Bankers culminated in this group joining Palestinians and Islamists in demonstrations against the government in the spring of 2011.¹⁶³ This undoubtedly caused concern within the government because the group fundamentally responsible for supporting the government had appeared to join

¹⁶⁰ Hamid, “How Stable is Jordan,” 1.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶² International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa,” *i.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

the opposition. It was clear that the tried and true methods of the regime for mitigating public discontent would not be accepted by the population after the beginning of the Arab Spring.

The East Bankers turning against the government represented a significant shift in the development of demonstrations in Jordan. However, differences still remained among the opposition groups regarding the specific reforms that needed to be implemented. The East Bankers were calling for an end to corruption and economic inequalities in society, which were commonly agreed upon issues by most opposition members.¹⁶⁴ All groups were, however, not united in their suggested paths toward reform. Palestinians and Islamists generally supported a more democratic and representative system as the solution to the problems within the rentier system. However, a state that fairly distributed representation to the population would increase the power of Palestinians.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, the East Bankers were not demanding democracy and were merely protesting their lack of economic favor over the past two decades. While this group joining the protests represented a huge blow to the credibility of the regime, their demands for reform did not align with those of other opposition groups and therefore did not support the calls for democracy of other protesters.

Another factor that contributed to the less than revolutionary results of the Jordanian Spring was the existence of certain laws preventing overt criticism of the government. Jordanians who wished to express their disapproval of the regime were forced to criticize the government specifically, and not the actual regime or king. Under Jordanian law, “criticism of the king and the royal family is a punishable crime” and

¹⁶⁴ Hamid, “How Stable is Jordan,” 4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

many journalists and opposition members have faced jail time for outspoken comments against the Hashemites.¹⁶⁶ This law effectively prevents any negative comments about the royal family from being articulated in the public sphere and gives the appearance that every member of the kingdom fully supports the king. While calls for reform addressed many economic and social grievances, these demonstrations could not reach the heart of the issues of the rentier system without being allowed to critique the actions of the few at the top of the system.

Foreign and Domestic Reactions to the Jordanian Spring

Jordan was long regarded as a pillar of stability and reform in the Middle East, and the turmoil created by protests in the spring of 2011 was extremely worrisome to the financial supporters of the regime. As the largest foreign donor on the Jordanian stage, the United States viewed its interests as being fundamentally threatened during the wave of popular protests that demanded substantial reform. The Hashemite Kingdom is the second largest recipient of American aid, which totaled \$818 million in 2010.¹⁶⁷ As a result of this substantial investment in the Jordanian system, the United States has relied upon Jordan to maintain its stability in the Middle East and to serve as its ally among many hostile regimes in the region. Instead of supporting what appeared to be a truly democratic movement calling for reform, the United States increased its annual aid by \$100 million and promised another \$400 to the kingdom through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation immediately after the Arab Spring broke out.¹⁶⁸ This influx of foreign aid helped the regime to continue its use of security systems and subsidies in order to quell popular dissent. American aid played a pivotal role in ensuring the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁷ Hamid, "How Stable is Jordan," 1.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

continuation of the rentier policies of the government, even at a time when entrenched regimes around the region were falling victim to popular calls for revolution.

In addition to Western supporters of the Jordanian regime, Saudi Arabia had often relied on Jordanian stability to serve its own interests. The Saudi-Jordanian border lies across a patch of desert, but the ties of these two nations lie much deeper below the surface. The Hashemites have lamented the loss of the Arabian Peninsula since it was taken over by the Saud family and have continued to accept aid from their oil wealthy southern neighbor despite the fact that they view themselves as the rightful guardians of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. In response to the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia extended an invitation for Jordan to join the Gulf Cooperation Council, although Jordan is not located on the Persian Gulf and does not possess any oil resources. This action would give the Jordanian government much more access to financial aid from wealthy Gulf nations and would allow the GCC states to pursue a five year development plan to continue Jordan's foreign assistance.¹⁶⁹ This increased aid would again allow the regime to continue its co-optive measures and ensure that the Jordanian monarch would not fall victim to the same fate as Hosni Mubarak or Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Saudi Arabia's government views Jordan as a substantial element to its own stability because the Jordanian monarchy holds traditional support from many of the same groups that are needed to prop up the Saudi regime.

Domestically, the executive and security systems have hindered past reforms and their presence in the current government has diminished any hope of true democracy coming to fruition. King Abdullah II's "desire to engineer the process from above has gone hand in hand with a resistance to any constitutional revisions that would dilute the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

power of the throne¹⁷⁰ and has therefore stopped any true movements toward democracy from occurring. In addition to the overarching power of the king, his security apparatus, the General Intelligence Department, or muhkabaraht, has consistently been given power over approving or rejecting cabinets and deters reform in addition to restricting academic freedom.¹⁷¹ The presence of the muhkabaraht in society deters members of the opposition from truly speaking out against the regime for fear of retribution or exclusion from receiving rent. Both the executive and the security forces have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo of the rentier state and have continued to reject any type of reform that would decrease their power.

In the past the king has relied upon the creation of national platforms in order to placate dissent within the regime and to encourage a sense of Jordanian nationality that would deter opposition from surfacing. The past decade has yielded three major platforms, ‘Jordan First’ in 2002, the ‘National Agenda’ in 2005 and ‘We Are All Jordan’ in 2006. While all of these programs were awarded significant media attention and funding, none of them made any real improvements on political or civil issues.¹⁷² In response to the renewed strength of the 2011 protests, the regime again turned to a new national agenda in order to placate the calls for reform. In March 2011, the National Dialogue Committee was established with the goal of proposing new reforms to the election law; however the implementation of its suggestions, including an open proportional list system, was not promised.¹⁷³ In addition to this lack of commitment to implementing reforms, this committee did not include any members of opposition

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷² Ibid., 3.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 3-4.

movements. By resorting to the same type of tactic utilized before the Arab Spring, the regime demonstrated its lack of willingness to commit to any action greater than façade reforms.

Furthermore, the National Dialogue Committee and the ensuing Economic Dialogue Committee were not given a fair chance at credibility by the regime. The IAF boycotted both of these committees in order to protest their lack of inclusion of opposition voices and caused both of these groups to lose credibility as a result.¹⁷⁴ The large amount of popularity that the IAF holds among Jordanians has given it the power to counteract the actions of the regime simply by boycotting committees or elections. Although these committees “initially dampened street mobilisation”, they were not enough to convince the population that true reform would follow and therefore dissatisfaction of East Bankers and Islamists alike continued.¹⁷⁵ Islamist groups in Jordan recognized that the regime was resorting to tactics of the past and called public attention to these committees through their boycott, which then urged on protests against the same problems that the committees were claiming to address.

Both a domestic stimulus program and the reshuffling of cabinet ministers were tactics employed by the regime to draw attention away from the inevitable resurgence of rentier policies. In January of 2011, King Abdullah II implemented a JD 160 million emergency plan that would decrease taxes and increase various subsidies throughout the country in order to spread more rent to more areas of the population and co-opt people previously dissatisfied with economic conditions.¹⁷⁶ Although this is an action often

¹⁷⁴ International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa,” 3.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.

taken by rentier governments in response to popular unrest, it did not prevent protesters from gathering to march in downtown Amman regardless of economic subsidies.

While the population is tiring of the same rentier policies being played out time and time again, these actions are mitigating popular unrest inside the country. Although there is no way to argue that these actions represent sustainable movement toward reform, “this mix of tactics arguably has worked. Protesters have failed to reach critical mass” and the country has returned to business as usual.¹⁷⁷ The creation of new committees along with the influx of aid into the economic system has, for the time being, seemed to lull the protesters into hoping that this cycle of façade reforms will turn into true liberalization measures. Additionally, the developing humanitarian crisis in Syria has deterred Jordanian demonstrators from pursuing any type of violent revolt against the government.¹⁷⁸ Only time will tell if these actions will placate the people for a few months or years before another wave of protests breaks out. The king also replaced Prime Minister Rifai with Marouf al-Bakhit, who has reportedly bad relations with the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷⁹ This move, in conjunction with the infusion of money into the economy, demonstrates how the regime is relying on old tactics to solve an evolving problem. Although these domestic factors have appeared to calm protestors they cannot change the fundamental issues without reforming the entire system.

Fall 2012: A Jordanian Spring?

While initially the kingdom remained insulated from the popular protests that had toppled many entrenched regimes around the Middle East, eventually Jordan had to face the harsh realities of the economic downturn. In early November 2012, the government

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., ii.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

chose to cut fuel subsidies in order to secure a two billion dollar IMF loan.¹⁸⁰ While fiscally this decision made sense, the government certainly did not anticipate the level of public anger that would erupt as a result of these price increases. Specifically, cutting subsidies led to increases of “50 percent for bottled gas used for cooking, 33 percent for diesel and kerosene for transport and heating and 14 percent on lower grade petrol.”¹⁸¹ The average Jordanian was disproportionately impacted by these higher prices because they had become reliant on artificially low prices, especially with regard to cooking gas. Protesters gathered in one of the main traffic circles in Amman immediately following the announcement of higher prices and caused many to wonder whether this action would bring the downfall of the Jordanian government.

Demonstrations in reaction to subsidy cuts are not a new occurrence in Jordan. Austerity measures that decreased food subsidies in 1988 fueled violent protests in the southern city of Maan, which is known for the presence of Jordanian Muslim militants. While the protests during the 1980s were some of the most violent that have ever taken place against the regime, they did eventually force more liberalization measures to be taken by the government in the form of removing martial law and holding parliamentary elections.¹⁸² Similar economic circumstances existed during the previous Maan riots as well, with an economic recession forcing the Jordanian government to implement budget cuts in order to receive financial assistance from the IMF. In the context of the Arab Spring, the renewed unrest in both urban and rural areas could encourage the regime to

¹⁸⁰ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Protests Erupt in Jordan after Fuel Prices Rise," *Reuters*, November 13, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/14/jordan-protests-idUSL5E8MDDOM20121114>.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² "Protests in Jordan after Spike in Fuel Prices," *Al Jazeera*, November 14, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012111464145140480.html>.

truly implement liberalization measures that would increase popular representation in government.

While the regime initially expected many of the protesters to be Islamists or their sympathizers, the crowds represented a diverse segment of the Jordanian population. The demonstrations were said to be led by mostly middle class, secular opposition, instead of the extremists that the government made them out to be.¹⁸³ Despite the new makeup of the crowds, the protesters faced the same obstacles that prevented the population from demanding change before the Arab Spring. Some groups were demanding raising subsidies back to previous levels, others wanted a crackdown on corruption and still others wanted the abdication of the king.¹⁸⁴ The division of the crowds detracted from their overall impact and the government was able to delay action because there was not one unified message from the opposition. The diversity of the population actively protesting against the government brought strength in numbers to voices of reform. Unfortunately, the lack of unity in demands detracted from the overall effectiveness of the demonstrators.

Legal hurdles also prevented the protests from reaching critical mass during the Fall of 2012. The fact that criticism of the king or the royal family had the potential to land protesters in prison for up to three years was enough to prevent some of the more moderate opposition from speaking out against the government. However, the crowds did not shy away from specifically mentioning the king in their demonstrations. A popular protest chant in Amman quickly became “freedom is from God, in spite of you

¹⁸³ David D. Kirkpatrick, "Protesters Come up Empty in Jordan," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/world/middleeast/protesters-in-jordan-see-ouster-of-the-king.html?_r=0.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

Abdullah.”¹⁸⁵ Those who joined in these chants did not do so without fear of the law, and many citizens experienced the wrath of the security forces after participating in these chants. Over 130 protesters were questioned by the *mukhabarat* following their calls for the downfall of the monarchy during demonstrations.¹⁸⁶ Restrictive laws protecting the monarchy prevented protesters from speaking their minds in the past and served as a warning to those who choose to criticize the king in this round of demonstrations. The all-encompassing nature of the security forces and intelligence agents continued to block citizens from making their demands for change stronger after the beginning of the Arab Spring.

January 2013 Parliamentary Elections

In the year leading up to the most recent set of Jordanian parliamentary elections, the government has made an effort to appease the protesters demand of forging a more representative system. The Independent Elections Committee (IEC) was formed in May 2012 as a regulatory agency that would ensure free and fair elections were taking place the following January. A watchdog agency was especially important during this most recent election cycle because of the changes that King Abdullah II announced to the election reform law in 2012. January 2013 represented the first time that voters were able to vote for two candidates, one at the national level and one on a local district level.¹⁸⁷ Although the government publicized this change as a substantial step towards democratic reform, doubts still remained among the population as to whether their representation

¹⁸⁵ Al Jazeera, “Protests in Jordan”.

¹⁸⁶ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Jordan Protesters Face Charges over Anti-Monarch Chants," *Reuters*, November 18, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/18/us-jordan-protests-arrests-idUSBRE8AH0FS20121118>.

¹⁸⁷ Khaled Neimat, "Final Election Results Endorsed," *The Jordan Times*, January 28, 2013, <http://jordantimes.com/final-election-results-endorsed>.

would actually increase as a result of this new law. By consistently paying lip service to reform but failing to truly give more power to the people, the regime has lost the confidence of many of its citizens.

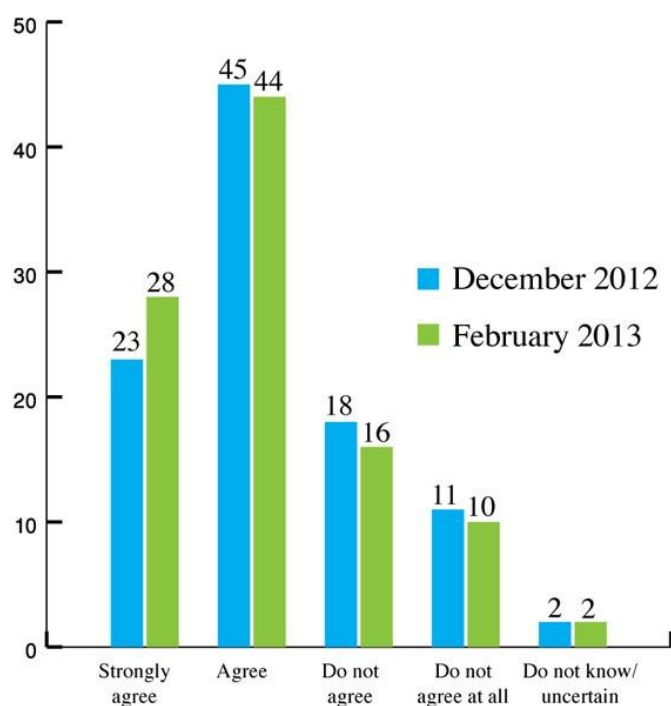
While there was not much popular faith in the IEC leading up to the elections, the commission did make a concerted effort to address concerns about validity of polling results. Initially the 27th seat at the national level was recorded as being won by a former minister, Hazem Qashou, complaints were lodged against this result and the votes were recounted. After the recount it was determined that the seat had in fact been won by a leftist leader named Abla Abu Olbeh.¹⁸⁸ The willingness of the commission to allow a leftist leader into power instead of a former minister who would have been more complacent with the regime's policies showed a true effort towards transparency and reform on the part of the government. While the regime may not have envisioned a leftist leader winning this seat, it still allowed the commission to operate independently of the government and did not step in to fabricate more favorable results.

This set of municipal elections presented an opportunity for the regime to show that it was truly committed to democratic reforms and a more open government system. In a surprising turn of events, the Islamic Centrist Party won "16 seats in the January 23 polls, including three through the national list competition and 13 in district-level races."¹⁸⁹ This substantial plurality won by the Islamists has given leaders within the ICP the necessary support for a coalition that they intend to build that will form the next government. While King Abdullah expressed that this new parliament would be the basis for creating a national program that would aid the formation of a new government, it

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Taylor Luck, "After Surprise Victory, Islamic Centrists Eye Speakership, Gov't," *The Jordan Times*, January 28, 2013, <http://jordantimes.com/after-surprise-victory-islamic-centrists-eye-speakership-govt>.

remains to be seen whether the regime will allow an Islamist party to hold this much power in politics. While the rentier state has allowed the results of this election to stand, an Islamist dominated government will certainly pose a threat to the elite rent seeking groups.



Khaled Neimat, "Majority Says Elections Were Free and Fair — Survey," *The Jordan Times*, February 20, 2013, <http://jordantimes.com/majority-says-elections-were-free-and-fair----survey>.

Despite the positive reviews given to the election process that resulted in moderate Islamist victories, the Muslim Brotherhood did not participate in the 2013 elections. The IAF, acting as the Muslim Brotherhood's affiliate, boycotted elections in order to protest the electoral law, which the group feels prevents its members from gaining the seats that they hold the popularity to win in reality.¹⁹⁰ While the actual influence of the Brotherhood is debatable because its members have never been able to

¹⁹⁰ "Jordan's Parliament Chooses PM for the First Time," *Al-Jazeera*, March 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/201339193556710937.html>.

run in free and fair elections in Jordan, the absence of this party definitely hindered the democratic viability of these elections. Democracy once again was undermined by the rentier system, which allowed moderate Islamists of the ICP to run fairly but restricted the success of the IAF in the most recent electoral law reform to the degree that the Muslim Brotherhood decided it could make a bigger political statement by removing itself from the elections entirely.

Beside the obvious reforms made in the elections process, the Jordanian regime has also promised to bring more popular participation into the selection of the next prime minister. While the swapping of ministers has frequently been used by the king to satisfy opposition demands, King Abdullah II announced in February 2012 that he will consult parliament before choosing the next prime minister of the nation.¹⁹¹ This announcement represented a significant change from the tactics typically employed by the rentier state in order to keep control of the political system. King Abdullah did safeguard his announcement by stating that consulting parliament would only be successful “if there is a national consensus on the elections law that led to this parliament.”¹⁹² By inserting this conditionality into his promise to include the voice of the people in the position of prime minister, the king left himself space to ignore the recommendations of an Islamist-dominated parliament and continue his practice of appointing a prime minister loyal to the regime.

In a historic measure, Jordan’s parliament voted to elect a prime minister in March 2013. Although King Abdullah had often used the mechanism of the post of prime

¹⁹¹ Nayla Razzouk and Mohammad Tayseer, "Jordan's King to Consult Parliament to Choose New Prime Minister," *Bloomberg*, February 10, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-02-10/jordan-s-king-to-consult-parliament-to-choose-new-prime-minister.html>.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

minister to quell demands for reform, he did follow through on his promise to give more power to popularly elected officials instead of arbitrarily chosen leaders. Parliament members selected Abdullah Ensour to serve in this position for the next four years.¹⁹³ While this historic move towards a more democratic system should be celebrated, the significance of this event has been hindered by the fact that Mr. Ensour is “committed enough to Abdullah's plan for cautious reforms to be the king's choice for prime minister in October” 2012.¹⁹⁴ Therefore this action needs to be put into the context of the political situation in Jordan over the six months preceding elections, when Ensour was also prime minister. If Ensour was enough of a favored member of the regime to be chosen by King Abdullah II prior to elections, then his credibility as a true champion of reform needs to be questioned. While Ensour’s actual tactics have not been seen in the long term, he was serving as prime minister during the fall 2012 riots and therefore has managed the administration of rentier politics in the past. The decision of parliament to choose a favorite of the regime is disappointing and their symbolic gesture of democracy will most likely not result in true change within the kingdom.

The cabinet members chosen by Ensour in March 2013 indicate a commitment to continue reform. Eighteen ministers were chosen by Ensour to be part of the nation’s seventy-seventh cabinet, and the thirteenth that has been formed while King Abdullah II has been in power. While some members of the previous cabinet remained in their posts, the majority of the ministers have not previously held such positions.¹⁹⁵ The most significant of the new appointments is that of Umayya Toukan, a strong supporter of

¹⁹³ "Jordan's Parliament Chooses PM for the First Time," *Al-Jazeera*, March 9, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/201339193556710937.html>.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ JT, "Ensour 19-Member Cabinet Sworn in," *The Jordan Times*, March 30, 2013, <http://jordantimes.com/ensour-19-member-cabinet-sworn-in>.

fiscal reforms, as the finance minister. Toukan has previously advocated implementing economic reforms in order for Jordan to fulfill the prerequisites that stand for receiving additional IMF aid. In Jordan's case, these IMF loans could amount to 385 million dollars by as early as April 2013.¹⁹⁶ While the liberalization measures, such as cutting subsidies, would help Jordan conform to Western norms and attain viability in globalized markets, the additional funds from the IMF will only allow the perpetuation of rentier policies. The selection of new cabinet members has proved that Prime Minister Ensour will continue to support marginal reform; however, it is unclear whether these reforms will bring democracy or simply a stronger economy under an autocratic ruler.

Possible Paths toward Reform

While Jordan is certainly not the only state in the Middle East facing the tough choice between harsh reforms now or revolution later, the economic situation presented in the Hashemite Kingdom is certainly unique. The Jordanian regime must find a way to alter the rentier system without completely losing the power that they currently hold. In the short term, the reshuffling of cabinet appointments and increasing subsidies have quelled dissent but the economic system of rentierism will prove to be unsustainable in the future. Jordan's "long-run goal must be to dismantle the rentier state where it is possible, and loosen its grip on the rest of the economy."¹⁹⁷ The Arab Spring has shown that when rentierism controls the entire economy of a nation, the only viable option for reform often comes through revolution. In order to avoid the violence and turmoil

¹⁹⁶ "Jordan's King Swears in New Cabinet," *Al Jazeera*, March 31, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/201333162638856123.html>.

¹⁹⁷ "The Economics of the Arab Spring: Rentier States- Natural or Artificial- Must Be Dismantled," *The Financial Times*, April 24, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/ea3a4776-6e9a-11e0-a13b-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2L1m7kga6>.

experienced by other fallen regimes during the past two years the Jordanian government must begin to release some of its control over the economy immediately.

Foreign donors may be the most influential in convincing the Jordanian regime to curb its exclusionary rentier policies. As the largest foreign donor involved on the Jordanian scene, the United States wields the most potential for placing pressure on the regime. The United States could use foreign assistance in conjunction with personal political relationships between the Obama administration and the Hashemite family in order to push for reform.¹⁹⁸ Implementation of this kind of foreign policy could involve anything from negative aid consequences if that status quo is maintained to an increase in aid following certain benchmarks for reform that the regime must meet. Whether or not America will place democratic reform over stability and a buffer for Israeli interests remains to be seen, but the power that the United States holds over Jordanian politics cannot be denied.

Jordan has always favored top down reform that has given it its stable reputation over the past century. The current problems raised by the Arab Spring cannot be explained away and cannot be brushed under the rug with more rent. While “there is always the temptation for the regime to wait and to postpone, but the gradual disaffection of the monarchy’s core constituency coupled with efforts to unify opposition ranks...could portend a new chapter in the Arab uprisings’ unfolding drama.”¹⁹⁹ The problem remains that by the time the regime realizes it must concede to the demands of the population; it may well be too late for reform to occur without a full-scale revolution overthrowing the existing government systems. If true reforms are made within the

¹⁹⁸ Hamid, “How Stable is Jordan,”7.

¹⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, “Popular Protest in North Africa,” *ii*.

system, and the new parties in power simply reinforce the status quo for their own benefit then the rentier system will continue with new leaders. If Jordan were to follow in the footsteps of Egypt and elect Islamist leaders then those new parliamentarians could simply continue distributing rent and feeding into the corruption that has been prevalent in the country since its creation. The international community will no doubt keep pumping aid into Jordan in order to ensure that the volatile situation in the Middle East does not engulf the entire region.

Conclusion: A Hopeless Cause or a Gradual Transition?

Throughout the turmoil of the Arab Spring, Jordan's rentier system has weathered the storm with moderate promises of reform that have prevented protests from destabilizing the government. While these small changes have been enough to quell calls for regime change, the instability throughout the region has shown that the rentier model is both economically and politically unsustainable. The Jordanian government has shown that it is only willing to reform as far as its own power and that of the elite is protected. Furthermore, even nations that have experienced a revolution, such as Egypt, are still grappling with the same restrictive power structure that was the original source of unrest. Jordanian leaders must utilize the Arab Spring as an opportunity to implement reforms beyond the survival tactics of the past fifty years. While the cycle of rent is difficult to break, the regime must realize that this self-reinforcing cycle will only lead to its own demise. Through a program of gradual economic liberalization, large scale protests should be able to be avoided and a more representative government can act as the true voice of the people. Jordan's test remains to be seen in the reactions of the population to liberalization that will inevitably push the elites out of their restrictive circle of power.

One of the issues that has continuously plagued Jordan, as well as all other rentier economies, is that of a bloated public sector blocking development of private enterprise. History has repeatedly shown the failure of the Washington Consensus in Arab states because forced liberalization measures have only caused social unrest and forced regimes to resort back to rentier subsidy policies. A lesson needs to be learned from the recent political upheavals that "private sector development is not simply a matter of improving investment climate, reducing the cost of doing business, offering cheap credit, or

introducing market friendly economic reforms. It is also a political problem, since a private sector that generates income streams independent of the patronage network of the regime can also be viewed as a political threat.”²⁰⁰ Elites have no incentive to promote economic changes that will decrease their standing in society, and the masses do not have the tools at their disposal to call for true reform. While Jordan’s private sector has continued to exhibit problems common in the Arab world, a bloated public sector is not sustainable in today’s increasingly globalized world. This chronic problem will continue to become relevant only when subsidies decrease and the public reacts, unless a gradual liberalization program is implemented. Although Jordan has been able to utilize foreign aid to stifle the calls for revolution when food prices have been increased in the past, this pattern is completely unsustainable and needs to be dealt with before an economic downturn forces change to happen quickly and violently. In tying economic realities to political incentives, the rentier state must be gradually abandoned in such a way that does not suddenly unseat the elites or push the masses into economic hardship. The political conditions of the Arab Spring serve as an appropriate warning to the entrenched regimes of the region that the unsustainable cyclical nature of the rentier state cannot continue forever.

The failed reforms throughout the years have discouraged the public from actively participating in government; however their support for reforms is not necessary given the balance of power in the rentier system. Elites have been given all of the benefits that come with the influx of foreign aid and remittances in Jordan and therefore have been the main proponents of maintaining the current system. The question of true liberalization has become “a question not just of the nature and attributes of reform, but also of elite

²⁰⁰ Adeel Malik and Bassem Awadallah, "The Economics of the Arab Spring," *World Development*, 2013, 2.

incentives.”²⁰¹ If the East Bankers in Jordan do not support a policy of the government, their opinions weigh much more heavily than those of the Palestinians or other marginalized groups. Incentives for the elites in the Jordanian system must be both political and economic because no privileged group will willingly accept a reduction in its current status. In a letter from tribal leaders to King Abdullah II in the wake of the Arab Spring, these groups made it clear that their interests were purely in the continuation of the rentier system and only aligned with democratic aims when it fit their economic needs. Specifically, this letter accused Queen Rania of being responsible for some of the rampant corruption within the kingdom.²⁰² Only a combination of economic and political incentives will be able to create the conditions necessary for effective change to occur in the Hashemite Kingdom.

Are Monarchies the Exception to the Arab Spring?

Throughout the past two years of turmoil and regime change in the Middle East, the general rule of Arab Spring revolts has been that Arab republics have been subject to waves of public opinion much more than Arab monarchies. In general, protests in Jordan, Morocco, and Bahrain have failed to reach critical mass whereas Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen have had their core political structure tested by consistent demonstrations. Monarchies have a few distinct advantages over their Arab republican counterparts. While many of the authoritarian republicans have ceased to accommodate political participation entirely, monarchies “can tolerate a much broader space for legal political dissent than can the authoritarian republics precisely because they do not have to pretend

²⁰¹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰² Karen Leigh, "Jordan's King Holds On."

that their authority to rule stems from electoral victories.”²⁰³ Although the Jordanian regime has outlawed any criticism of the king or the royal family, protesters still have the ability to assert their wishes for change without threatening the stability of the country. The Muslim Brotherhood may not be allowed to fairly run for seats in parliament, but the ICP has been allowed to have a façade of power in government as long as the real power remains in the hands of the regime elites. While this premise of allowing for some extent of dissent under monarchical rule may not be a sustainable system, Jordan has been able to escape from the bloodshed and turmoil experienced by Arab republican states.

Beyond allowing for a wider span of political opinions, the Hashemite monarchy is able to enhance its legitimacy through its ancestral ties to the guardians of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, and, indirectly, to Prophet Muhammad. This is the case with most monarchies in the Arab world, and their Muslim populations accept descent from the prophet as a foundation of the right of these families to rule. While “popular expressions of adoration of the ruler are [often] motivated by self preservation,” the fact remains that monarchies are able to garner popular support through their heritage.²⁰⁴ Specifically in the case of Jordan, King Hussein “did enjoy a degree of popular support, but King Abdullah and Queen Rania have been the subject of widespread criticism” and have had many more questions raised about their legitimacy than had ever been discussed prior to Abdullah’s ascent to the throne.²⁰⁵ The past popularity of the late King Hussein has shielded King Abdullah from some of the harsher criticisms of his rule, however the general sentiment remains that Hussein was much more committed to the reform process

²⁰³ Jillian Schwedler, "The End of Monarchical Exceptionalism," *Al Jazeera*, June 22, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/06/2011621155732501502.html>.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

than his son. Despite the some calls for regime change in Jordan, the lineage of the Hashemite family combined with the popularity of the last king has been able to insulate the kingdom from the same type of violent upheavals occurring in republics around the Middle East.

Protesters in Jordan have often been unsuccessful in achieving their demands for change as a result of the inconsistencies of their demands. While calls for economic reform have radiated throughout the kingdom, all major groups of protesters have been unified in their support for a continuation of King Abdullah's rule.²⁰⁶ The king's tactic of changing ministers and calling for parliamentary elections during times of unrest has been successful in defraying his own accountability for the state of affairs in his own nation. This system has allowed for any "conflict [to appear to be] between the King's elected government and the opposition" instead of a conflict between the monarchy and its people.²⁰⁷ Although the king has been able to portray any failings during his rule as problems with the government and not with his own goals of reform, the end result has continued to be frustration for citizens who elect new parliamentary representatives who do not act on behalf of the people. No true structural changes to the rentier system will be able to be enacted while the king remains in this position of infallibility.

Is There a Path Out of the Rentier System?

An argument exists that King Abdullah II is truly a democratic reformer at heart, however he is a victim to the pitfalls of the rentier system that has been built up over the past fifty years. In an interview with Jeffery Goldberg shortly after ascending to the throne in 1999, Abdullah stated that "privatization, modernization, and political

²⁰⁶ Karen Leigh, "As Protests Turn Violent, Jordan Ponders Reform," *TIME*, March 29, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2061804,00.html>.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

liberalization were all high on the agenda” for reform within the kingdom.²⁰⁸ His lofty goals would have pushed Jordan to liberalize its economy and gradually move away from the patronage system that previous leaders had supported. Despite all of the late King Hussein’s popularity, he “was not a modern manager, and he bequeathed to his son a sclerotic economy and a political system built on *wasta*, or favoritism, and the exploitation of tribal rivalries. Abdullah believed he would fix all that.”²⁰⁹ With all of these liberal ideals, Abdullah was seen as a leader who would be able to steer the country towards a more representative system that did not rely on support from tribal leaders over popular support garnered from a majority Palestinian population.

Over the course of his rule, the king has fallen short of many of his initial reform initiatives. Abdullah clearly understands “that the Hashemite throne, and perhaps Jordan itself, will not survive the coming decades if he does not move his country briskly toward modernity,” however concrete actions for modernization and liberalization have yet to materialize.²¹⁰ Many members of the Hashemite family have been accused of personally perpetuating corruption within the kingdom, including reports that the king himself has become addicted to gambling. While the royal court disputes these claims as mere rumors, it is significant that those at the top of the system are seen as lacking commitment to true reform. Whether or not Abdullah has personally contributed to the corruption within the rentier state, he cannot claim to have taken any steps towards reforming Jordan’s economy. Actions have spoken louder than words and the king’s good intentions have meant little over the course of his rule.

²⁰⁸ Jeffery Goldberg, "The Modern King in the Arab Spring," *The Atlantic*, March 18, 2013, 2, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/04/monarch-in-the-middle/309270/2/>.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

Abdullah's reform efforts have consistently been thwarted by elements within the regime. The king has been repeatedly frustrated with the lack of transparency within the *mukhabarat*, or intelligence services, because of the conservative attitude of the entire organization. These agents have, according to Abdullah, inserted themselves in politics in order to further the East Bank agenda and enforce the status quo.²¹¹ Additionally, the East Bank tribal leaders have pushed the king into supporting their platform of patronage because of their significant electoral sway.²¹² As pro-democracy as the king's initial intentions may have been, he has not been able to push past these entrenched elements of the rentier state. If there is to be any hope of reform, Abdullah will need to give up the support of these key elements of the regime and accept a more popularly supported system that may reduce his own power.

Despite his repeated pledges of support for liberalization and modernization, King Abdullah has shown himself to be in favor of democracy that has specific restrictions. While he has openly supported a democratic system that would give more representation to the majority of Palestinians living in Jordan, he has stopped short of agreeing to any electoral reforms that would allow the Muslim Brotherhood to gain more support in parliament. "In other words, the king wants to bring political reform to Jordan, and to cede some of his power to the people- but only to the right people."²¹³ Rentier politics under Abdullah have proved to simply perpetuate the status quo in order to serve the interests of rent seeking groups. When more popular representation is allowed, such as in the most recent round of electoral reforms, it is carried out in such a way that reform can be engineered from the top down in order to maintain the interests of those in power.

²¹¹ Ibid., 2.

²¹² Ibid., 1.

²¹³ Ibid.

King Abdullah has repeatedly been told by Western advisors that he must allow the Muslim Brotherhood to have a substantial voice in the government in order to prove that he is truly committed to democracy. The king, however, feels that the “Brotherhood is run by “wolves in sheep’s clothing” and wants to impose its retrograde vision of society and its anti-Western politics on the Muslim Middle East.”²¹⁴ He believes that the Brotherhood intends to support democratic devices as a means to accumulating power without an actual desire to utilize any liberal form of government once they have gained the necessary support. While the Brotherhood stands out as the primary alternative to the rule of the rentier state, their true intentions will not be able to be seen until they have been given the political power they claim to deserve.

There are two theories behind the secondary role that the Brotherhood has agreed to play in the Jordanian government. One states that the group stays out of elections because they are certain that the government will fall soon and they do not wish to claim any accountability for the actions of a corrupt regime. The other is more sinister and asserts that this organization is actively plotting to bring down the government and therefore they do not wish to have any of their members involved in the current rentier system. “The king, for his part, is certain that the Muslim Brotherhood wants to see him gone. The GID has told him that the Brotherhood high command in Cairo is actively fomenting unrest in Jordan.”²¹⁵ His certainty that members of the Brotherhood are simply biding their time until they can seize a moment to overthrow him has meant that Abdullah will not allow electoral reforms to be passed that will enable the Muslim Brotherhood to gain a significant majority in parliament. The true intentions of this group

²¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

remain unclear, but it is certain that their absence from the system is holding it back from becoming a constitutional democracy.

To What Extent Does the System Control the King?

King Abdullah has extolled the benefits of representative government ever since ascending to the throne, despite the lack of concrete changes that have been made to the rentier system. A possible reason for the absence of reforms is that “perhaps Abdullah is so taken with the American system that, if anything, he overstates its virtues. In his proselytizing for political reform, he holds up the United States as the Platonic ideal. The paralysis and pettiness of Washington does not seem to have made an impression on him.”²¹⁶ Abdullah’s American education has seemed to have instilled a love of democracy that has endured throughout his years as king, even if he has not been able to implement the reforms he believes will benefit his nation.

The question remains to be raised that, if Abdullah believes in liberalization and representation, why has he allowed the rentier system to become more and more entrenched throughout the course of his rule. While “Abdullah seems to genuinely want his people to be richer, happier, and more politically empowered than they are now” he has been unwilling or unable to take action to achieve these goals. A possible explanation could be that he is realistic enough to recognize “that only if Jordanians are content will they readily agree to the perpetuation of Hashemite rule.”²¹⁷ He has become trapped by the system that he is supposed to lead and although he is the absolute ruler, he has encountered many opponents of his agenda, from conservative East Bankers and revolutionary Muslim Brothers alike. The king’s intentions have ceased to be significant

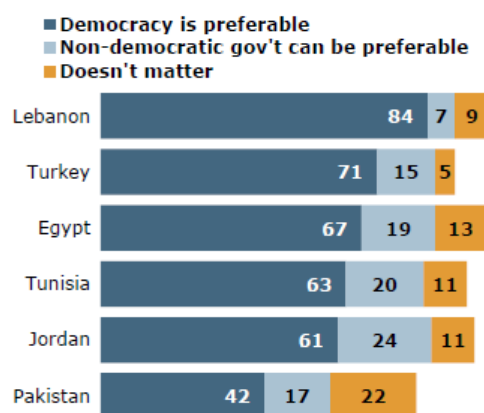
²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

in a rentier system that has expanded to encompass the entire government and has trapped all citizens in the cycles of rent-seeking.

The sentiment on the Jordanian street regarding democracy is a significant, if not the most significant, factor in determining if democracy can be sustainable. While a majority of Jordanians polled in 2012 did express a favorable view of democracy, they “have become less likely to hold this view since last year, when 72% said it was better than any other type of government.”²¹⁸ In order for democratic reforms to be successful, the population must be willing to push for its own rights. While the majority of Jordanians still prefer democracy over other forms of government, if the current negative trend of public opinion continues there will soon be little support for a representative government. It is clear that there is not much time left for liberal reform in Jordan and citizens are beginning to lose faith in democracy as a whole.

Strong Preference for Democracy



Andrew Kohut, ed., *Most Muslims Want Democracy* (n.p.: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2012), 14.

Beyond internal pressures that prevent the king from making any substantial reforms, international actors play a significant role in perpetuating the rentier system. President Obama visited Israel, Palestine, and Jordan in March 2013 and he spent much

²¹⁸ Andrew Kohut, ed., *Most Muslims Want Democracy* (n.p.: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2012), 14.

of his time in Jordan discussing the growing Syrian refugee crisis. Upon returning to America, President Obama pledged 200 million dollars of additional humanitarian aid to the Jordanian government.²¹⁹ It cannot be certain exactly what this money will be spent on, but it is clear that the corruption within the Jordanian regime has utilized foreign aid for its own benefit in the past. Jordan does truly need this aid to deal with the influx of refugees crossing its border from Syria each day. In early April 2013, the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan was estimated at more than 400,000, with more fleeing the violence each day.²²⁰ Despite the urgent and dire need of these people for food and shelter, it is not clear that all of the aid being sent to Jordan is actually benefitting those in need. The rampant corruption in the rentier regime has pushed money away from its rightful recipients in the past and remains a significant factor in the impact of the international aid flooding into the country.

Looking to the Future

After considering all aspects of the rentier state in Jordan and all of the barriers preventing reform, the situation appears relatively hopeless. Reforms have been implemented from the top of the system down, and the reforms that are allowed to take effect by the government largely serve to reinforce the status quo with the façade of change. Domestically, rent seeking groups such as the East Bank tribal leaders have continued to resist any political or economic reforms that would negatively impact their elite status in society. Internationally, foreign powers such as the United States and the Gulf States have continued to pour money into the Jordanian system in the hope of

²¹⁹ Jennifer Epstein and Josh Gerstein, "Obama Promises Jordan \$200 Million in Aid," *POLITICO*, March 22, 2013, <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/03/obama-syria-aid-89232.html>.

²²⁰ "Jordan," Syria Regional Refugee Response, last modified April 2, 2013, accessed April 2, 2013, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.

propping up an unsustainable regime. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Jordan cannot afford to uphold the rentier system, nor can it successfully turn this system into a more representative and open state.

King Abdullah has become trapped by his own system, and any reforms that he has intended to make have been quelled by actors who have an interest in maintaining the channels of rent in the kingdom. Regarding Crown Prince Hussein, “the biggest favor [Abdullah] could do for his son now, he says, is to de-emphasize the power of the throne. “The monarchy is going to change. When my son becomes of age and becomes king, the system will be stabilized and ... it will be a Western democracy with a constitutional monarchy.” But, he says, “even with all the changes I’m doing here, there is still going to be a monarchy.”²²¹ It appears for the sake of the continuation of the monarchy in Jordan; King Abdullah’s approach will continue to be mitigating popular unrest so that he can prevent blame from falling on his own family. There is not enough support for democracy or economic liberalization within the kingdom or from international actors, and the system will continue give benefits to those at the top, and oppress the majority of the Jordanian population.

While an Islamist revolution could theoretically destroy the system from the bottom-up, the transition to a more representative government would not come easily to a state that has sustained such an entrenched system since its inception. Any lasting change would have to result organically and would have to be supported by the majority of the population, a majority that is currently not in favor of any reform that would decrease subsidies on basic goods. While the current system will most likely not morph into a democracy in the future, hopefully the movement away from the monarchy that Abdullah

²²¹ Jeffery Goldberg, “The Modern King in the Arab Spring,” 2.

has suggested will open the system to political newcomers who will be able begin to work towards economic, if not political, liberalization. If absolutely no change occurs and the system continues to reinforce itself, then political revolution or economic collapse could likely be the next development in the Hashemite Kingdom.

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