

Jordan and the Peace Process

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Brief Analysis

Jordan's peace with Israel is based on a strategic decision to develop a new atmosphere of peace in the region based on cooperation and interdependence. From the beginning this peace has been a warm one; more than an agreement between two governments, it encompasses the daily interactions of two peoples. There are fifteen sub-agreements to the treaty covering broad areas of cooperation including economics, transportation, tourism, and agriculture. Moreover, Jordan is continually seeking future areas of cooperation, such as proposed projects to jointly develop the Jordan Rift Valley and trade and tourism zones for Aqaba and Eilat.

The Jordanian peace model is unique to the region. It is the only model that addresses the average Israeli citizen's basic need to be accepted by his/her neighbors. It therefore follows that the Jordan-Israel treaty has been endorsed by all sectors of Israeli society: followers of Labor and Likud, secular and religious, Arabs and Jews. Thus, the change in Israel's government will not affect Amman's relationship with Jerusalem.

If this model is to succeed and become the norm within the region, it is imperative to broaden the framework. Cooperation will bring benefits not only to Jordan but also to the entire Middle East, creating a region of stability, prosperity, and interdependence. If this model fails, it could deal a fatal blow to the vision of peace for all people of the region.

Relations with the United States

To ensure the success of Jordan's model of peace with Israel, the United States needs to raise the level of political and economic support toward Jordan to a new plateau. Support for the kingdom, or other states in the region, should not be viewed as country-to-country assistance, but rather as assistance extended in the pursuit of peace. If the Jordan model is successful, it will serve U.S. interests of peace and security in the region. Moreover, by keeping a sense of neutrality throughout the Israeli elections, Jordan now enjoys the trust of the new government and will therefore be key to the United States in upcoming months.

Jordan's Economic Program

Jordan is currently implementing a successful economic restructuring program. The economy is moving toward globalization by focusing on export-oriented growth, foreign investment, and privatization. Jordan, however, does need a "jump start" of about \$200 million per year for three or four years this would not be a perpetual arrangement to move the country forward from its present difficulties to a level where it can succeed on its own. Tourism is already up 25 percent and foreign investments from the first half of 1996 already total the investments from 1995.

The economic program was initially launched in 1989 but was interrupted by the Gulf crisis. A second interruption of the program coming today would produce dangerous consequences for Jordan and the region. Unfortunately, expectations of economic improvements from the treaty with Israel have been dampened and the Jordanian public is yet to feel tangible benefits from peace. While the United States generously provided debt relief to Jordan, this only removed a problem; it did not provide stimulus for new growth. The tolerance level among Jordanians today is much lower than it was in 1990 and an economic setback could lead to disaster for Jordan and its model of peace.

Sharm al-Sheikh

Amman was pleased with the Sharm al-Sheikh conference when it took place, recognizing it as a good starting point for handling an important regional issue counter-terrorism. Today, however, the conference is viewed as having been a photo opportunity for world leaders. Although King Hussein made many positive suggestions for combating terrorism, no effective measures have been taken to translate the discussion into concrete actions. Hopefully the process begun at Sharm al-Sheikh will soon be resumed in a more effective manner.

Jordan's Role in Final Status Talks

Jordan is well-positioned to play a prominent role in efforts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. This role, however, is one of a "catalyst," not a substitute, for the Palestinians. Many Israeli and American analysts believe that a Likud government can serve its own interests as well as those of Jordan by offering the kingdom a role in the West Bank. This is contrary to Jordan's interests and desires. Moreover, under the Labor government Jordan was offered such a role on numerous occasions and turned it down. Amman fully supports the Palestinians in their upcoming negotiations. Only after the final outcome is determined will Jordan consider different options for a link with the Palestinians, a link that will be determined by the free will of both peoples.

The peace process cannot reach a stage where Jordan is isolated and progress on the other tracks has stalled. Therefore, Jordan must assume a positive role in moving the process forward toward the only logical solution of a durable regional peace. In this regard, it is especially essential that there be progress on the Palestinian track, given the family and personal bonds that link Jordanians and Palestinians.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Lauren Rossman.



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