

# Book Review: Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship

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## Bruce Riedel's latest book has numerous insights on U.S. relations with Amman, but also many unfortunate omissions.

In July 2021, U.S. president Biden thanked King Abdullah II for Jordan's "enduring and strategic" relationship with the United States. Washington and Amman have indeed been close since 1999 when King Abdullah ascended the throne, but it was not always the case. In his new book *Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship*, former CIA analyst Riedel chronicles this relationship from the Truman administration through the initial months of the Biden administration. Riedel surveys well-known highs and lows, bringing personal insights from his 30-year government career.

The book is peppered with colorful facts from dozens of biographies and interviews. Even those familiar with the history of Jordan will be interested in how U.S. ambassador Harrison Symmes was expelled from the kingdom in 1970; how the assassination of former Jordanian premier Wasfi al-Tal soured King Hussein on Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, and when, before the 1991 Kuwait War, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher told Hussein, "Your Majesty, you have no more of a role in the Middle East."

The book also has conspicuous omissions. Riedel skips any reference to the visit with President Truman by an envoy of the kingdom's founder, the first King Abdullah. We also hear little about later U.S.-Jordanian intelligence cooperation, one of the most robust elements of the bilateral ties, an aspect of the "enduring friendship" about which Riedel should bring special insights. Nor does Riedel discuss the U.S. Agency for International Development's outsized role in Jordan, the largest such mission in the region.

Also missing are descriptions of recent irritants. Riedel mentions, for example, the 2016 killing of three U.S. Special Forces troops at the hands of a Jordanian soldier, observing, "It was a sad end to the Obama years." More "sad"—but unnoted in the book—is that the kingdom initially tried to cover up the murders and was reluctant to put on trial the

Jordanian soldier, who hailed from a prominent tribe.

These gaps are annoying, as is Riedel's occasional bias. For example, he points out that King Abdullah found it difficult to work with a senior National Security Council staffer during the Bush administration. Then, in a non sequitur, he criticizes President Trump for not mentioning human rights, political reform, or democracy at the 2017 Riyadh summit. Reidel does not say if these were priorities for other U.S. presidents; he does not mention human rights until nearly the last page when he describes Jordan as “a relatively benign police state.”

In the end, Riedel is optimistic about U.S.-Jordanian relations even as he argues that Jordan “can do better.” Regrettably, Riedel's policy recommendations are relatively thin and focused on reform of the kingdom's powerful intelligence service. While the book is a useful historical overview, given the importance and depth of the relationship, the topic deserves further discussion.

*This review was originally published [on the Middle East Forum website](https://www.meforum.org/63044/jordan-and-america-an-enduring-friendship) (<https://www.meforum.org/63044/jordan-and-america-an-enduring-friendship>). ❖*

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