

PolicyWatch 364

Bio Sketch: Jordan's New Crown Prince, Abdullah bin Hussein

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Today, Jordan's King Hussein formally decreed that his eldest son, Abdullah, would become crown prince in place of the king's brother, Hassan. Following is a brief biographical sketch of Abdullah.

Born: Amman, January 30, 1962

Mother: King Hussein's second wife, Princess Muna al-Hussein (Toni Avril Gardiner)

Personal status: Married to H.R.H. Rania Abdullah (ne, Rania Yassin, from the West Bank town of Tulkarm); one son, one daughter.

Education: Primary, Islamic Educational College, Amman; St. Edmund's School, Surrey, England; Secondary, Deerfield Academy, U.S.; College, Oxford University, one-year program in International Politics (1983-84); Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, one-year mid-career program (1987-88).

Military Training: Sandhurst Royal Academy; Fort Knox Armor School (Company Commander's Course); All Arms Tactics Course, British School of Infantry; British Command and Staff College, Camberley.

Military Experience: 1981 -- commissioned as second lieutenant, served as reconnaissance troop leader, Royal Hussars (British Army)

1984 -- first lieutenant, platoon leader, 40th armored brigade

1985 -- captain, tank company commander, 91st brigade

1986 -- captain, tactics instructor, Jordanian Air Force helicopter anti-tank wing

1989 -- major, second-in-command, 17th tank battalion, 2nd Guards brigade

1991 -- lieutenant colonel, armor representative, Office of the Inspector General

1992 -- commander, 2nd armored car regiment, 40th brigade

1993 -- promoted to full colonel

1994 -- promoted to brigadier, appointed commander of Jordanian Special Forces

1996 -- Special Forces reorganized as the Special Operations Command, incorporating the Special Forces Brigade and the Royal Guard. According to Jane's Intelligence Review (December 1, 1998), the Special Forces' missions include:

- unconventional-warfare missions and counterinsurgency operations;
- internal-security assignments and counterterrorism missions;
- countersabotage assignments both inside Jordan as well as in defense of Jordanian installations around the world;
- riot control;
- "conventional" and "unconventional" military operations beyond the scope and abilities of the conventional Jordanian army
- training other units of the armed forces in special operations, including counterterrorism and hostage-rescue.
- acting as the armed forces' strategic reserve during full-scale military deployments;

Political Role: Prince Abdullah has deputized for his father, King Hussein, on a number of occasions and joined his

father for important missions on many others. Over the years, these have included meetings with American and Soviet leaders. (In December 1987, at the age of 25, Abdullah led the list of those accompanying his father in Moscow talks with Andrei Gromyko.) Abdullah has been a frequent visitor to Washington, especially to the Pentagon, where he has repeatedly made Jordan's case for upgraded military assistance.

In the Arab world, in December 1998, Abdullah hand-delivered a letter from the king to Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, congratulating Qadhafi on his recovery from hip surgery. Libyan radio quoted the letter as saying that Jordan would continue to "exert its efforts until the unjust [United Nations] sanctions are lifted." In March 1998, he topped the list of dignitaries accompanying the king to Oman. He has joined his father on numerous other trips, including to visit Hafiz al-Asad in Damascus and (in the pre-Gulf War era) to visit Saddam Husayn in Baghdad.

As far as Israel is concerned, Abdullah has played an active role in aspects of normalization, especially military-to-military relations. For example, when then-Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak made an official visit to Jordan in July 1997, he observed a Special Forces training exercise commanded by Abdullah. Abdullah participated in a meeting with then-Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai in March 1997 and put on a live-fire display for Mordechai at the military training grounds near Zarqa. In December 1996, Abdullah hosted Jordan's first-ever weapons exhibition, attended by thirty countries, including Israel. In June 1996, in an example of airborne diplomacy, Abdullah participated in an international team of parachutists that jumped jointly over Jordan and Israel, pinning golden paratrooper wings on each jumper. According to press reports, his actions "forged bonds between two former enemies in that special paratrooper way."

In international relations, Abdullah has traveled widely, apparently taking a special interest in Asian affairs. In November 1995, Abdullah led a fourteen-member delegation to Malaysia; in May 1991, he led a delegation to Taiwan. In December 1993, Abdullah led a delegation to North Korea and was even granted an audience with "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung himself.

Background Nugget: On May 30, 1985, the Washington Post reported the following exchange with Abdullah at a dinner in his father's honor hosted at the State Department.

"Would Abdullah ever become king?"

"It's a very awkward question," the prince picked up. "Because it's really the most capable person at a given time. To find someone with the capabilities of my father is very hard. People like that come once in a century. I'm still a very young man, so it would be presumptuous of me..."

"But would it be possible?"

"Yes, it is possible," said the prince. "But it would just depend on the situation. Picking a leader is not something that should be done automatically because of a given position."

Compiled by Robert Satloff and Benjamin Orbach.