



THE SON ALSO RISES?

Jordan's uncertain future

By Charmaine Seitz

AMMAN, JORDAN

Tall columns rise oddly out of southern Jordan's red sandstone cliffs. The Petran architecture appears Roman, except for telltale spirals curling in the column capitals. Here the ancient Nabatean designer added his own touches to a building style borrowed from trading partners across the sea.

Modern Jordan is no different from that Nabatean architect—the small nation created on land once inhabited by nomads has borrowed and blended to shape its contemporary culture. “Jordan was never the basis of a massive civilization,” Jordanian journalist Rami Khouri says. “It has always had to live according to its wits.”

For the past 46 years, those wits belonged to King Hussein bin Talal. Now that the king has died, Jordanians face an uncertain future. “He brought the world to our door,” says Mahmoud Katamish, a tour guide in Aqaba. Literally speaking, Katamish is right. Hussein's funeral on Feb. 8 brought nearly 50 heads of state to Amman. Many of them, like the presidents of Turkey and Cyprus or leaders of Israel and Syria, laid aside hostilities to pay homage to the well-liked monarch. While Jordanians revered their king for his humility and accessibility, world leaders respected the kind of commitment Hussein displayed by flying from his sickbed to last fall's Wye Plantation talks in a push for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

But the King's popularity is not the only explanation for the large turnout at his funeral. Many leaders came to show their support for the existence of Jordan itself, now a nation of 4.6 million people. Created through British gerrymandering in 1921, the dry, resource-poor colony was drawn into existence primarily to create a friendly buffer in the Middle East. Now that the pragmatic Hussein has passed away, the world is watching to see how this strategic space on the map and its new king, Hussein's 37-year-old son Abdullah, fare in today's turbulent climate.

When Jordan was granted its independence in 1946, the country was run primarily by clan leaders, who petitioned favor from the first King Abdullah, Hussein's grandfather. At that time, Jordan adopted the French penal code and British civil law. Years later, the country is still struggling to meld Western systems into Arab values.

Abdullah was a pragmatist (some say opportunist) who didn't oppose the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Such views, however, didn't keep Jordan out of the 1948 war between Jewish forces and the surrounding Arab states—and in the final armistice, Jordan managed to gain control of the West Bank and half of Jerusalem (which it lost in the 1967 Six-Day War), absorbing more than a million new Palestinian

citizens. Abdullah's grandson, Hussein, was left to deal with the changing Jordanian society when Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian in Jerusalem in 1951.

Hussein earned his reputation as a strong monarch seven years later, when, at 21, he survived a coup attempt. In 1970, he drove out a Palestinian threat to his rule, killing hundreds. That battle, in which Yasser Arafat-led Palestinian fighters were routed by the Jordanian Army, remains “Black September” to Palestinians but stands as a symbol of Jordan's tenuous autonomy to non-Palestinian Jordanians.

Jordan wasn't the only Arab nation to experience upheaval and face overwhelming ideological challenges in adapting to modern statehood. Since the early '80s, with the fall of communism, the rise of ethnic nationalism and the draw of political Islam, the Middle East has undergone unrest and civil war. While Jordan largely has avoided long-lasting bloody conflicts, it has witnessed the rise of Islamism and an almost catastrophic devaluation of its currency.

In this climate, Jordan has undergone 15 years of immense commercial changes. The economic boom began when neighboring Iraq could no longer pay for expensive imports because it was pouring money into the Iran-Iraq War. Instead, it arranged for Jordan to produce its tables, chairs and other necessities, jump-starting local industry.

That same Jordanian reliance on wealthy neighbors proved devastating when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Much of Jordan's economy depended upon laborers in Gulf states who were sent home after the king angered their leaders by supporting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, with the Allies' closure of the Gulf of Aqaba, Jordan's large shipping industry suffered dearly and only recently has started to recover.

Today, Jordan remains in an economic slump. Its population will increase by 3 percent this year, while its economic growth is expected to be slightly less. Currently the annual average per capita income is approximately \$1,500, and unless Jordan manages to capitalize upon the tourist wave expected for millennial celebrations, few expect that to rise. If the current drought continues, it will ravage local crops, underscoring Jordan's feeling of vulnerability among its resource-rich neighbors.

When President Bill Clinton came to Hussein's funeral, he brought with him a \$300 million aid package that slowly is making its way through Congress. The Clinton administration has prioritized foreign aid to Jordan in hopes that the small state will remain one of its few friends in the region. “This isn't charity,” says one embassy official, “this is what we determine to be in U.S. interests.”

Economist Riyadh Khouri (Rami's brother) is wary of these kinds of handouts. He says that foreign aid only shores up Jordan's already burgeoning military state. Instead, he hopes Jordan will take advantage of the coming millennium to broaden its tourist industry and diversify its markets. Yet without an investment in security and stability, Riyadh admits, Jordan's economy will suffer further. The government is Jordan's largest employer, and unemployment already is running at around 30 percent. "If only you could solve the problem of the Palestinians," he says, "then maybe Jordan could develop a real economy"—one not based merely upon Jordan's strategic importance.

But Jordan cannot escape its own dependence upon peace in the region. As long as the Palestinians remain without a state of their own, Jordan's Palestinian refugees will continue to clamor for a home. And as long as Israel remains isolated in the region, Jordan's own peace with the Jewish state will remain awkward at best. Hussein's support of Iraq against the Allies in the Gulf War exemplifies its problem of serving as a buffer between hostile states. Although Jordan lost money and Western ties by siding with Saddam Hussein, its king was unable to go against public sentiment and join the allies. Once King Hussein backed away from Iraq, cozied up to the United States, and eventually made peace with Israel, he became vulnerable to charges of thwarting democracy.

Hence it is with trepidation that Jordanians are closely watching the upcoming Israeli elections. If hard-line Likud Party Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wins office once again and peace talks remain at a standstill, Jordan, where Palestinians make up 70 percent of the population, can expect problems. Trade with Israel would continue to slow and regional instability would drive tourists away. Most Jordanians agree that until the Palestinian problem is solved—that is, an Israeli government comes to power that is able to forge a lasting peace—Jordan will remain tied to the world's strategic needs at the expense of its own growth.

Faced with all these difficulties, the last thing that Jordanians needed was to get used to a new king. Chosen in an eleventh hour decision over King Hussein's brother, Crown Prince Hassan (who had been groomed to be king much of his adult life), King Abdullah is very much a mystery to many of his subjects. Educated in the United States, he has kept a low profile as head of the Jordanian Special Forces. "He has the basic ingredients," says Abla Amawi, a sociologist who once taught the new king. "He is kind-hearted and humble."

Even those who were critical of his father have high hopes

for where Abdullah might lead the country. In handling threats to his country or regime, Hussein used both democratic institutions and his ability to shut down parliamentary opposition to his advantage. The late king's most vocal critics say he presented the trappings of a democratic state, but choked civil society in the name of unity. Labib Kamhawi, a university professor

whose criticism of the monarchy has kept him out of the classroom, says that since Hussein dissolved parliament in 1993, Jordan "is back to square one" as a developing democracy. However, Kamhawi believes that because Abdullah does not share the same public support as his father, the new monarch will be forced to introduce more power-sharing, a change that will help build democratic institutions.

Abdullah took one step in that direction by ousting many ministers loyal to his uncle, replacing them with more liberal politicians and technocrats. Day-to-day government operations will be led by an outspoken and media-savvy prime minister, Abdul-Raouf Rawabdeh. Such changes in a system that has seen 84 different governments since its inception do not mean the monarchy is on its way out. For many Jordanians, however, a new system isn't the answer. "People don't mind having a king," Rami Khouri says, "as long as the king works for them."

Those who are pessimistic say that Abdullah's background as head of Jordan's Special Forces only guarantees that the country will remain highly militarized. However, the new monarch can use his international network of military officials, many of them a young generation of future Arab leaders, to aid his country. These contacts are strongest in the Gulf, where one Saudi prince already has promised to sell Jordan local oil at a reduced rate, as well as to ease restrictions on Jordanian laborers.

There are also those—certainly Syria and Iraq—waiting to test the young king. Palestinian leader Arafat angered Jordanian leaders by reintroducing the idea of a confederacy with Jordan only one week after Hussein's death. The late king had finessed that issue, a proposition not necessarily in Jordan's interests, by saying confederacy can

only happen between two independent states. But Arafat, staring down the approaching May 4 expiration of the Oslo peace accords, seems to be exploring all his options.

The history of the modern Jordanian state is no longer intimately tied with only one man. But while Jordanians are anxious about how Abdullah will rise to the many challenges he faces, they are confident the nation will survive. Blending the traditions of the desert and ties of family life with the influence of its neighbors and the West, contemporary Jordan will endure in the same way as the ancient Nabateans—carving new patterns while making use of the old. ■

Charmaine Seitz writes regularly on the Middle East. She lives near Jerusalem.



Now that the popular Hussein (above) has died, the world is closely watching the new king, his son Abdullah.

PHOTERS

By Salim Muwakkil

Once again, the streets of America are filling up with marchers protesting murderous police. This time, the proximate causes are the 19-bullet execution of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in New York and the 12-bullet termination of 19-year-old Tyisha Miller in Riverside, Calif. But underlying this new round of protests is the realization that police departments across the country are brutalizing minority youth with growing frequency and relative impunity.

The 31 bullets police used to kill these two victims were less than half of the 68 total shots they fired. The all-white cop crew who killed Diallo on Feb. 4 as he stood unarmed in the vestibule of his Bronx apartment building unloaded 41 bullets. Another four cops fired 27 shots at Miller's body after she was startled awake while sleeping in a disabled car on Dec. 28. The black teenager allegedly had a gun and, according to the police, reached for it when one of the officers broke the car window. The police claimed Miller fired at them first, but they later recanted that story.

Outrage has been building over the past few years as the list of innocent victims of police violence lengthens. But the executions of Miller and Diallo triggered demands for action. On Feb. 25, a wide-ranging coalition of civil rights groups called a news conference asking President Clinton to order a national summit on police brutality. "It is most necessary, Mr. President, for you not to see this as a New York problem or a Pittsburgh problem or a Los Angeles problem, but as a national problem," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, a member of the Feb. 25 coalition, has been leading daily demonstrations in New York against police violence since the Diallo shooting. On March 3, Sharpton mobilized nearly 5,000 people in a protest on Wall Street to "let the business community know that we won't permit business-as-usual" as long as the police department remains unaccountable to the city's black and Latino citizens. Sharpton and 28 others were arrested following the demonstration and vowed to commit more acts of civil disobedience.

Other protests—some calling for more minority police recruitment, others urging Black Panther-type militia groups—have taken place throughout the city almost daily. On Feb. 27, about 500 members of the Black Men's Movement (including members of Khallid Abdul Muhammad's New Black Panthers) marched through



TERRY LABAN

No Cop Accountability

What will it take to stop police brutality?

Brooklyn protesting police violence and urging armed self-defense. A group called Women for Justice mobilized nearly 1,000 people for a rally outside City Hall on March 8.

As president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, the Rev. Jesse Jackson has been leading an ongoing national crusade to denounce the quickening tempo of outrageous police violence. At the Feb. 25 news conference, Jackson said that many of the nation's police officers have succumbed to an "almost fascist madness" that has had a terrorizing effect on minority neighborhoods.

On Feb. 27 Jackson led a march of about 1,000 people in Riverside to condemn police action in the Miller killing. Jackson excoriated the Riverside police for acting as a "firing squad" in killing Miller. Mayor Ron Loveridge refused to meet with Jackson, city officials accused him of inciting racial discord and Jeffrey Joseph, president of the Riverside Police Officers Association, said the reverend was more interested in sound bites than finding the truth. The case is being investigated by the Riverside County district attorney's office, which is expected to release its findings soon. The FBI also is monitoring the shooting to determine whether the Justice Department should launch a full-scale civil rights investigation.

The number of police abuse incidents over the last few years are too numerous to list. But none of them have been compelling enough to attract the sustained interest of the coun-