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Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a key U.S. partner in the Middle East, and the two countries have cooperated on a number of regional and international issues. Jordan remains at peace with Israel and is a primary interlocutor with the Palestinians. Ongoing instability in neighboring Syria and Iraq magnifies Jordan's strategic importance to the United States. Jordan also is a longtime U.S. partner in global counterterrorism operations. U.S.-Jordanian military, intelligence, and diplomatic cooperation seeks to empower political moderates, reduce sectarian conflict, and eliminate terrorist threats in the region. U.S. officials frequently express their support for Jordan. U.S. assistance has helped Jordan address serious vulnerabilities, both internal and external. Jordan's small size, refugee burden, and lack of major economic resources have made it dependent on aid from Western and various Arab sources. The Biden Administration has acknowledged Jordan's role as a central U.S. partner in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, as many U.S. policymakers advocate for continued robust U.S. assistance to the kingdom. Jordan also hosts nearly 3,000 U.S. troops.

Annual U.S. aid to Jordan has tripled in historical terms over the last 15 years. The United States has provided economic and military aid to Jordan since 1951 and 1957, respectively. Total bilateral U.S. aid (overseen by the Departments of State and Defense) to Jordan through FY2020 amounted to approximately \$26.4 billion. The President's FY2024 budget request includes \$1.45 billion for Jordan. On September 16, 2022, the United States and Jordan signed their fourth Memorandum of Understanding governing U.S. foreign aid to Jordan. The seven-year agreement (FY2023-FY2029), subject to appropriations of Congress, commits the Administration to seeking a total of \$1.45 billion in annual economic and military aid for Jordan.

P.L. 117-328, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, provides \$1.65 billion in total bilateral foreign assistance to Jordan. This includes over \$1.2 billion in Economic Support Funds, of which \$845 million was specified as a direct cash transfer to the Jordanian government. The act also provides \$425 million in Foreign Military Financing. In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying P.L. 117-328, appropriators stated that the act "supports the Government of Jordan in making sustainable economic reforms, including in the water and public sectors, consistent with the terms of the new Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and the Government of Jordan."

Beyond assistance from the State and Foreign Operations appropriations accounts, P.L. 117-328 also provides Jordan with security assistance from Defense Department appropriations accounts. The act specified that Jordan receive "not less than" \$150 million from the Defense Department's Operation and Maintenance, Defense-Wide account for the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to reimburse Jordan for border security. Starting in FY2016 (Section 1226 of P.L. 114-92), successive National Defense Authorization Acts have authorized the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to provide support, on a reimbursement basis, to Jordan (among other countries) for the purpose of supporting and enhancing its military's efforts to increase security along the border with Iraq and Syria. P.L. 117-328 also included "up to" \$500 million in Defense Department assistance to support "the armed forces of Jordan and to enhance security along its borders." The act also included authority for loan guarantees for Jordan.

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Overview

As of June 2023, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (hereinafter referred to as “Jordan”) remains a stable and, according to U.S. policymakers, vital U.S. security partner in the Middle East. Successive presidential administrations have considered Jordan to be, along with Israel, one of the most reliable U.S. security partners in the Middle East. Jordan considers the United States to be one of its most important international supporters, though it also relies heavily on members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)¹ for political and financial backing.

During periods of political unrest and fiscal restraint, the GCC states have offered multi-year grants and loan packages to the kingdom. In 2011 amidst region-wide unrest, the GCC pledged \$5 billion in aid to Jordan over five years; in 2018 amidst a nation-wide teacher’s strike, Gulf benefactors pledged another \$2.5 billion. In addition to investment by GCC states in Jordan, the oil-rich Gulf monarchies are a destination for Jordanian expatriate labor. According to official government statistics, 786,000 Jordanian expatriates remitted \$3.45 billion in 2022; a third of these workers live in Saudi Arabia, followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United States, Kuwait, and Qatar.²

Despite its powerful friends, Jordan faces a number of ongoing challenges—some systemic and long-standing, and others more recent. From a security standpoint, Jordan is a U.S. partner in the global fight against international terrorism, serving as a coalition member in Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR). Ongoing Israeli-Palestinian tensions also are a major concern, particularly as they relate to Jerusalem and its holy sites. Jordan is an ardent advocate for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jordanian monarchs trace their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, and King Abdullah II’s role as guardian of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem is critical to his domestic legitimacy. A large portion of Jordan’s population—perhaps a majority—identify as Palestinians, so Israeli-Palestinian issues have major implications for domestic political sentiment within the kingdom. The decade-old Syrian civil war also threatens Jordanian security, particularly as criminal elements within the Asad regime have turned to synthetic drug smuggling across the Jordanian-Syrian border (**see below**).

Demographically and economically, 60% of Jordan’s population is below the age of 30, and the kingdom is beset by chronically high youth unemployment (possibly as high as 40%). With the private sector unable to provide enough attractive jobs to young workers, the government has had to absorb those workers who do not emigrate to Gulf states or elsewhere (unemployment overall is 22.9%). The national budget runs perennial deficits in part due to an oversized public workforce and subsidization program. Nonetheless, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been working with Jordan to reduce deficit spending; from 2020 to 2024, the IMF intends to disburse \$2.46 billion in loans contingent upon certain economic reforms, such as raising government revenue by reducing tax evasion and closing tax loopholes.

To date, King Abdullah II has been able to manage these various domestic and regional challenges, though not without dissent from within the royal family. The king’s half-brother Hamzah voiced rare public criticism of the monarch and has been under indefinite house arrest since spring 2022.

¹ GCC members are Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

² “Jordanian expats send home \$3.4bln in 2022,” Jordan News Agency (Petra), February 1, 2023.

Figure I. Jordan at a Glance



Area: 89,342 sq. km. (34,495 sq. mi., slightly smaller than Indiana).

Population: 10,998,531 (2022); Amman (capital): 2.2 million (2022).

Country of Origin: Jordanian 69.3%, Syrian 13.3%, Palestinian 6.7%, Egyptian 6.7%, Iraqi 1.4%, other 2.6% (includes Armenian, Circassian) (2015 est.). *note: data represent population by self-identified nationality*

Religion: Sunni Muslim 97.2%, Christian 2.2%, Buddhist 0.4%, Hindu 0.1%.

Percent of Population Under Age 25: 52% (2022).

Youth Unemployment (ages 15-24): 37.3.% (2019).

Source: Graphic created by CRS using figures from CIA *World Factbook*.

Country Background

Jordan, created by colonial powers after World War I, initially consisted of desert or semidesert territory east of the Jordan River, inhabited largely by people of Bedouin tribal background, the original “East Bank” Jordanians.³ The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 brought large numbers of Palestinian refugees to Jordan, which subsequently unilaterally annexed a Palestinian enclave west of the Jordan River known as the West Bank—later captured by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.⁴ The “East Bank” Jordanians, though probably no longer a majority in Jordan, remain predominant in the country’s political and military establishments and form the bedrock of support for the Jordanian monarchy. Jordanians of Palestinian origin make up an estimated 55%

³ For historical background, see Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Country Profile: Jordan*, September 2006.

⁴ Though there was little international recognition of Jordan’s 1950 annexation of the West Bank, Jordan maintained control of it (including East Jerusalem) until Israel took military control of it during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and maintained its claim to it until relinquishing the claim to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1988. In an address to the nation, the late King Hussein stated on July 31, 1988, that “We respect the wish of the PLO, the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, to secede from us as an independent Palestinian state.” See http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/88_july31.html.

to 70% of the population. They tend to gravitate toward employment in the private sector, most likely due to their alleged general exclusion from certain public-sector and military positions.⁵

The Hashemite Royal Family

Jordan is a hereditary constitutional monarchy under the prestigious Hashemite family, which claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad. King Abdullah II (age 61) has ruled the country since 1999, when he succeeded to the throne upon the death of his father, the late King Hussein, who had ruled for 47 years. Educated largely in Britain and the United States, King Abdullah II had earlier pursued a military career, ultimately serving as commander of Jordan's Special Operations Forces with the rank of major general.

The king's son, Prince Hussein bin Abdullah (born in 1994), is the designated crown prince.⁶ On June 1, 2023, Crown Prince Hussein married Rajwa al Saif, an architect, Saudi citizen, and second cousin to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Their marriage engendered speculation as to whether this union would foster closer Jordanian-Saudi ties.⁷ As previously mentioned, Jordan is dependent on Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies for direct aid, soft loans, and work permits for Jordanian citizens seeking opportunities abroad.

The occasion was celebrated nationwide with weeklong activities and a holiday for workers, marking the first politically significant royal nuptial since King Abdullah II and Queen Rania's wedding nearly thirty years ago. Along with other foreign dignitaries, U.S. First Lady Jill Biden attended the wedding in person, and she and President Biden offered their congratulations over social media.⁸

Crown Prince Hussein's wedding also was significant for domestic political reasons. As previously mentioned, the King's half-brother Hamzah has been under house arrest. According to one report, he remains popular amongst tribal families and, "Since the palace crisis [Hamzah's arrest], the monarchy has ramped up efforts to burnish Hussein's public image and cement his role as the rightful heir."⁹

Figure 2. King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein



Source: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock.com.

⁵ Speculation over the ratio of East Bankers to Palestinians (those who arrived as refugees and immigrants since 1948 and their descendants) in Jordanian society is a sensitive domestic issue. Jordan last conducted a national census in 2015, and it is unclear whether or not the government maintains such national-origin statistics. Over time, intermarriage has made it more difficult to discern distinct differences between the two communities, though divisions do persist.

⁶ In July 2009, King Abdullah II named Prince Hussein (then 15 years old) as crown prince. The position had been vacant since 2004, when King Abdullah II removed the title from his half-brother, Prince Hamzah. Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, now 29, is a graduate of Georgetown University and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (UK). He holds the rank of second lieutenant in the Jordanian Armed Forces.

⁷ "A wishful wedding: Can Jordan fall in love with Saudi Arabia?" *The Economist*, May 25, 2023.

⁸ Jill Biden (FLOTUS), Twitter post, June 1, 2023, 1:24 p.m., available at <https://twitter.com/FLOTUS/status/1664321991434813461>.

⁹ Isabel Debre, "Young crown prince is meant to embody Jordan's future, but his generation faces bleak prospects," Associated Press, June 20, 2023.

Political System and Key Institutions

The Jordanian constitution, most recently amended in 2022, gives the king broad executive powers.¹⁰ The king appoints the prime minister and may dismiss him or accept his resignation. He also has the sole power to appoint the crown prince, senior military leaders, justices of the constitutional court, and all members of the senate, as well as cabinet ministers. The constitution enables the king to dissolve both houses of parliament and postpone lower house elections for two years.¹¹ The king can circumvent parliament through a constitutional mechanism that allows the cabinet to issue provisional legislation when parliament is not sitting or has been dissolved.¹² The king also must approve laws before they can take effect, although a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament can modify legislation. The king also can issue royal decrees, which are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The king commands the armed forces, declares war, and ratifies treaties. Finally, Article 195 of the Jordanian Penal Code prohibits insulting the dignity of the king (*lèse-majesté*), with criminal penalties of one to three years in prison. Article 38 of the constitution grants the king the power to issue pardons.

Successive Jordanian parliaments have mostly complied with the policies laid out by the Royal Court. The legislative branch's independence has been curtailed not only by a legal system that rests authority largely in the hands of the monarch, but also by electoral laws designed to produce pro-palace majorities with each new election.¹³ Due to frequent gerrymandering, in which electoral districts arguably are drawn to favor more rural, pro-government constituencies over densely populated urban areas, parliamentary elections have produced large pro-government majorities dominated by representatives of prominent tribal families.¹⁴ In addition, voter turnout tends to be much higher in pro-government areas, since many East Bank Jordanians depend on familial and tribal connections as a means to access patronage jobs.¹⁵ The next parliamentary election is scheduled for November 2024.

Jordan's constitution provides for an independent judiciary. According to Article 97, "Judges are independent, and in the exercise of their judicial functions they are subject to no authority other than that of the law." Jordan has three main types of courts: civil courts, special courts (some of which are military/state security courts), and religious courts. State security courts administered by military and civilian judges handle criminal cases involving espionage, bribery of public officials, trafficking in narcotics or weapons, black marketeering, and "security offenses."¹⁶ Religious courts for both Muslims and Christians adjudicate matters of personal status, including

¹⁰ In the last twelve years, Jordan's constitution has been amended three times (2011, 2016, and 2022).

¹¹ The king also may declare martial law. According to Article 125, "In the event of an emergency of such a serious nature that action under the preceding Article of the present Constitution will be considered insufficient for the defense of the Kingdom, the King may by a Royal Decree, based on a decision of the Council of Ministers, declare martial law in the whole or any part of the Kingdom." See Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Constitutional Court, "Jordanian Constitution," available at <https://cco.gov.jo/en-us/Jordanian-Constitutional>.

¹² Amendments to Article 94 in 2011 put some restrictions on when the executive is allowed to issue temporary laws.

¹³ Kristen Kao, "How Jordan's Election Revealed Enduring Weaknesses in Its Political System," *Washington Post*, October 3, 2016.

¹⁴ Rachel Bessette, "Jordan's Parliamentary Elections: Why They Do (and Don't) Matter for the Kingdom's Future," *Lawfare*, September 29, 2016.

¹⁵ Sean L. Yom, "Tribal Politics in Contemporary Jordan: The Case of the HIRAK Movement," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 68, no. 2 (Spring 2014), pp. 229-247.

¹⁶ See U.S. Embassy in Jordan, "Jordanian Legal System," available at <https://jo.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/attorneys/jordanian-legal-system/>.

marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.¹⁷ The king may appoint and dismiss judges by decree, though in practice a palace-appointed Higher Judicial Council manages court appointments, promotions, transfers, and retirements.

Political Reform and Human Rights

Since his ascension to the throne in 1999, King Abdullah II has at times laid out a vision of Jordan's gradual transition from a constitutional monarchy into a full-fledged parliamentary democracy.¹⁸ During periods of domestic unrest, Jordanian leaders have taken limited steps to liberalize the political system without fundamentally altering the monarchical power structure. In times of crisis, the government also often appeals for Jordanian unity,¹⁹ while calling the opposition divisive or even disloyal.²⁰

Gender Issues in Jordan

Jordan has consistently ranked in the bottom quintile of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap index (122 of 146 countries in 2022, though above most countries in the Middle East and North Africa region). Some have pointed to "traditional attitudes, discriminatory legislation, a lack of access to public transportation and pay disparities" as barriers to women's advancement in Jordan.²¹ Despite having one of the highest rates of female literacy in the Middle East, Jordan's female labor force participation rate is considered low (15% as of 2021).²² Unequal pay also is an issue in Jordan, where the gender wage gap (as of 2018) is estimated at 18% in the public sector and 14% in the private sector.²³

Jordan has received funding through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-administered Women's Global Development and Prosperity Fund, launched in 2019, specifically to support government efforts to amend the country's labor code to prohibit gender discrimination.²⁴ USAID allocates U.S. bilateral economic assistance to support programs that protect victims of gender-based violence, improve women's access to jobs and leadership opportunities in the private sector, and support the advancement of women to decision-making positions. In addition to partnering with various government ministries, USAID also partners with the Jordanian National Commission for Women headed by Princess Basma Bint Talal, paternal aunt to King Abdullah II.

Unlike in neighboring Egypt, the kingdom tolerates Muslim Brotherhood political activity, and Brotherhood candidates sometimes compete in parliamentary elections, though the Brotherhood also has boycotted previous elections in protest. The Brotherhood is currently divided between Islamists who are willing to participate in the political system and those who reject it. In the 2020 parliamentary election, Brotherhood candidates ran together on a list called the National Alliance

¹⁷ In Muslim sharia courts, the testimony of one man equals that of two women, with exceptions in certain cases. U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Jordan*, March 30, 2021.

¹⁸ See Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, "Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians," royal discussion paper, January 16, 2013; Curtis R. Ryan, "The King's Speech," *Foreign Policy*, June 17, 2011.

¹⁹ In 2002, just a few years into his reign and amid a Palestinian uprising against Israelis (including in the neighboring West Bank), King Abdullah II launched a nationwide campaign known as "Jordan First," in which he called on citizens to reaffirm their "loyalty to the homeland." See Sana Abdallah, "Jordan's King Launches Identity Campaign," *UPI*, October 31, 2002.

²⁰ "Jordan's solid national unity is what makes it special—King," *Jordan Times*, September 16, 2015.

²¹ Rana F. Sweis, "Women, 86 Percent Absent from Jordan's Work Force, Are Left Behind," *New York Times*, April 3, 2021.

²² Holly Welborn Benner and Anders Pedersen, "Want Jordan to prosper? Engage women!" *World Bank Blog*, December 22, 2021.

²³ International Labour Organization, *Gender Equality and Decent Work in Jordan*, April 30, 2021.

²⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Women's Global Development and Prosperity Annual Report 2020-2021*, January 2021.

Reform. The list won 10 seats in Jordan’s 130-member House of Representatives (down from 16 in the 2016 election); of those 10 seats, 6 went to actual Islamist-leaning candidates.²⁵

Over the past 15 years, as Jordan’s economic growth has stalled (see **Figure 3**), economic grievances have spurred protests in Jordan, and authorities have responded by limiting the space for the expression of political opposition.

Trucker Strike Turns Violent

In late 2022/early 2023, truck drivers across the kingdom went on strike to protest higher diesel fuel prices. Though Jordan has been working with the IMF under a structural reform program to maintain fuel prices in line with the global market, it had temporarily reinstated fuel subsidies after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. It began re-phasing them out later in 2022, which caused widespread discontent. Protesters clashed with police, who used tear gas to disperse crowds. The authorities also suspended access to some social media platforms. In the impoverished southern province of Ma’an, a police commander was murdered during the unrest and, during an attempt to arrest a suspect, three more policemen were killed. In order to negotiate an end to the truckers’ strike, though the government maintained its commitment to eliminating fuel subsidies, it did allow commercial haulers to raise their rates for commercial haulage and transport.²⁶

While traditionally Jordan had been considered to be somewhat more tolerant of dissent than its Arab neighbors, the international democracy watchdog organization Freedom House changed Jordan’s rating in 2021 from “partially free” to “not free,” asserting that Jordan’s status declined due to harsh new restrictions on freedom of assembly, among other things (it also ranked “not free” in 2022 and 2023).²⁷ In September 2022, Human Rights Watch stated that “Civic space in Jordan has shrunk over the past four years as authorities persecute and harass citizens organizing peacefully and engaging in political dissent.”²⁸ Internet freedom is a particularly sensitive issue in Jordan, where journalists have decried the ambiguity of cybercrime legislation, such as Article 11 of the 2015 Cybercrime Law.²⁹ The law states that “anyone who on purpose posts or reposts statements or information on the internet, that include tort and slander, or the denigration of anyone, faces no less than three months in jail and a fine of no less than JD100 [or 100 Jordanian dinars] (\$140) and not more than JD1,000 (\$1,400).”

²⁵ Suha Ma’ayeh and Rana F. Sweis, *Jordan’s 2020 Parliamentary Election: Settling for the Status Quo*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, February 2021.

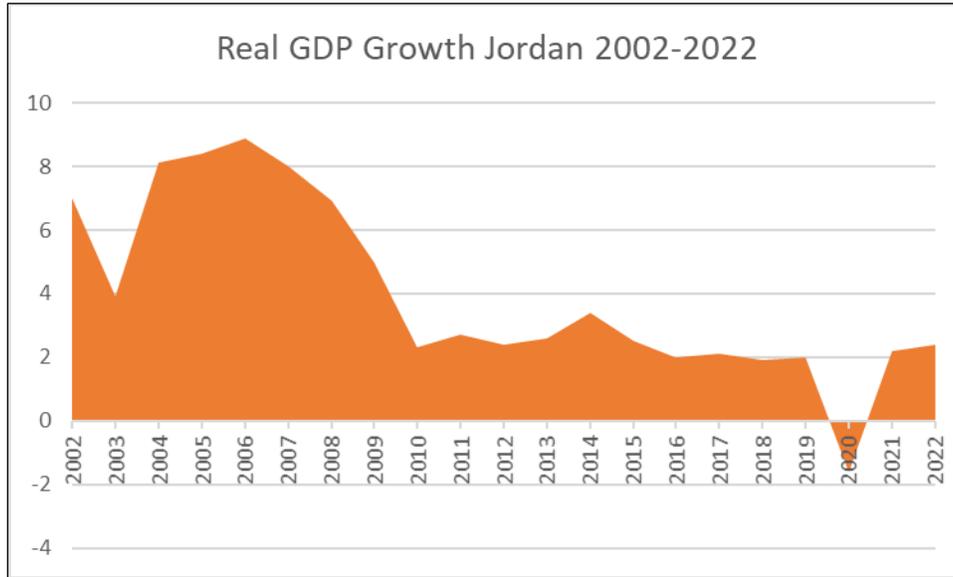
²⁶ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Jordan truckers’ strike exposes woes of impoverished south,” Reuters, January 12, 2023.

²⁷ Freedom House, “Jordan: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report,” available at <https://freedomhouse.org/country/jordan/freedom-world/2021>.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Jordan: Government Crushes Civic Space, Detentions, Interrogations, Harassment and Restrictions on Basic Rights,” September 18, 2022.

²⁹ Mustafa Abu Sneineh, “Jordan: Prominent Palestinian journalist detained at airport under Cybercrime Law,” *Middle East Eye*, March 8, 2022.

Figure 3. Twenty Years of GDP Growth in Jordan
(2002 to 2022)



Source: International Monetary Fund DATAMAPPER.

Economy

In 2023, Jordan’s post-pandemic recovery has continued, with GDP growth for the year projected to be 2.7%. Jordan’s fiscal policy would appear in line with IMF-efforts to reduce spending and borrowing. According to the IMF’s most recent assessment:

Despite a challenging global and regional environment, Jordan has maintained macroeconomic stability and access to international capital markets through prudent monetary and fiscal policies. As a result, the [IMF] program remains firmly on track, with key program targets met and continued strong progress on structural benchmarks. The central government reduced its primary deficit (excluding grants) by 0.8 percent of GDP in 2022, to 3.7 percent of GDP, by taking timely measures to offset the higher cost of subsidies. Meanwhile, the CBJ has successfully maintained monetary and financial stability. It remains committed to the peg and has raised policy rates in line with the U.S. Federal Reserve. As a result, inflation has been relatively moderate and has started to decline. The banking system remains well-capitalized and liquid, as also confirmed by the recent Financial System Sustainability Assessment.³⁰

Despite this somewhat more positive outlook, economists remain concerned about Jordan’s sovereign debt load (108% of GDP in 2022). According to *The Economist*, “Jordan’s total debt/GDP ratio is high by regional standards and limits the government’s ability to provide subsidies or fund social support, increasing the risk of social unrest.”³¹ Servicing Jordan’s growing national debt continues to constrain government spending, increasing the possibility that without external assistance, costs in the form of increased taxes and reduced subsidies may be passed on to Jordanian consumers. The World Bank has noted that Jordan benefits from a

³⁰ International Monetary Fund, “IMF Staff Reach Staff-Level Agreement with Jordan on the Sixth Review Under the Extended Fund Facility,” press release no. 23/156, May 17, 2023.

³¹ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report Jordan*, November 20, 2022.

“relatively favorable debt structure,” in that its external creditors provide concessional loans on favorable repayment terms.³²

Foreign Relations

Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinians

Background

The Jordanian government has long described efforts to secure a lasting end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as one of its highest priorities. In 1994, Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty.³³ Nearly three decades after the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, the persistence of Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be a major challenge for Jordan, as the issue of Palestinian rights resonates with much of the population, and the conflict has soured attempts to improve Jordanian-Israeli people-to-people relations.

According to a recent poll conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy:

Despite being officially at peace with Israel for almost three decades, a solid majority (84%) of Jordanians across all age groups stand opposed to having business deals with Israeli companies even if it would help their economy. This data is consistent with Jordanian attitudes documented in past polls between July 2020 and March 2022.... Moreover, a majority (60%) of Jordanians view Hamas firing missiles at Israel at least somewhat positively, whereas a minority of 37% of Jordanians consider such actions to be negative for the region.³⁴

While Jordanian-Israeli military cooperation is quietly ongoing, civil relations between governments wax and wane depending on the attitudes and policy positions of the countries' respective leaders. Typically, right-of-center Israeli parties, which tend to take positions opposing the exchange of land for peace with the Palestinians, have more difficult relations with the kingdom when in power, as evidenced by the era of strained ties between King Abdullah II and Benjamin Netanyahu during the latter's second stint as prime minister (2009-2021).³⁵ Right-of-center parties have dominated Israeli politics since 2001.

³² World Bank, *Jordan Economic Monitor: Global Turbulence Dampens Recovery and Job Creation*, Spring 2022.

³³ Jordan and Israel signed the peace treaty on October 26, 1994. Later, the two countries exchanged ambassadors, Israel returned approximately 131 square miles of territory near the Rift Valley to Jordan, Jordan's parliament repealed laws banning contacts with Israel, and the two countries signed a number of bilateral agreements between 1994 and 1996 to normalize economic and cultural links. Water sharing, a recurring problem, is addressed in Annex II of the treaty and coordinated by the Joint Water Committee comprising Israeli and Jordanian officials. According to the 1994 treaty, in exchange for certain Jordanian concessions to Israel, Israel agreed to supply Jordan with 50 million cubic meters of water a year from the northern part of Israel (in a separate agreement, Israel agreed to sell Jordan another 10 million cubic meters in 2010). The Annex also states that “Israel and Jordan shall cooperate in finding sources for the supply to Jordan of an additional quantity of (50) MCM/year [million cubic meters] of water of drinkable standards.” See Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty Annex II,” available at <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/israel-jordan-peace-treaty-annex-2>.

³⁴ Faris Almaari, “New Public Opinion Poll: Jordanians Favor De-escalation in the Region, But Sentiment Against Israel Remains,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Fikra Forum*, June 9, 2023.

³⁵ David Schenker and Ghaith al-Omari, “Getting the Israel-Jordan Relationship back on Track,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 12, 2021.

Current Tensions with Israel

In line with the pattern mentioned above, during 2023, the kingdom and Israel's right-of-center coalition government (led by returning Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after his 18-month displacement by a different coalition) have often clashed politically over Israeli-Palestinian issues. Many of Jordan's objections stem from the actions of two Israeli ultra-nationalist members of Netanyahu's cabinet, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir. Smotrich has devoted his career to expanding Jewish control in the West Bank, and Ben Gvir expresses many similar views.

In January 2023, Ben Gvir visited Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif (Mount/Haram) a few days after taking office, triggering statements of condemnation or concern from the Jordanian government and others within the region and globally.³⁶ Ben Gvir made another visit in May 2023, again triggering substantial criticism from Jordan and elsewhere.³⁷ In March 2023, Smotrich gave a speech at a podium featuring a map that included Jordan and the occupied West Bank as part of Israel. The Jordanian government called on the international community to denounce such actions.³⁸

Jordanian officials have repeatedly called on the new Israeli government to maintain the historic "status quo" (see **text box below**) that allows only Muslims to worship at the Temple Mount/Haram al Sharif ("Mount/Haram") in Jerusalem's Old City.³⁹ Jordanian officials have long asserted that Israeli authorities under successive governments—regardless of their political tilt—have undermined the status quo's prohibition of non-Muslim worship on the Mount/Haram.⁴⁰ In an interview with CNN, King Abdullah II warned against any Israeli provocations regarding the Mount/Haram, saying:

If people want to get into a conflict with us, we're quite prepared.... I always like to believe that, let's look at the glass half full, but we have certain red lines... And if people want to push those red lines, then we will deal with that.⁴¹

³⁶ "Jordan delivers statement at Security Council meeting on Israeli violations of Al-Haram Al-Sharif," Jordan News Agency (Petra), January 6, 2023.

³⁷ "U.S., UAE, Jordan, Egypt Slam Ben-Gvir's Temple Mount Visit: 'Serious Status Quo Violation,'" *Haaretz*, May 21, 2023.

³⁸ Barak Ravid, "Jordan condemns far-right Israeli minister over 'Greater Israel' map," *Axios*, March 20, 2023.

³⁹ "Jordan said to warn incoming government against touching Temple Mount status quo," *Times of Israel*, November 7, 2022.

⁴⁰ "Jordan pushing to restore Jerusalem mosque status quo—sources," Reuters, April 27, 2022.

⁴¹ Zeena Saifi, "Jordan king warns of 'red lines' in Jerusalem as Netanyahu returns to office," *CNN*, December 28, 2022.

Holy Sites in Jerusalem⁴²

Per arrangements dating back to 1967 (when the Israeli military seized East Jerusalem—including its Old City—from Jordan) and then subsequently confirmed in the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, Israel acknowledges a continuing role for Jordan vis-à-vis Jerusalem’s historic Muslim shrines.⁴³ A Jordanian *waqf* (or Islamic custodial trust) has long administered the Temple Mount (known by Muslims as the Haram al Sharif or Noble Sanctuary) and its holy sites, and this role is key to bolstering the religious legitimacy of the Jordanian royal family’s rule. As mentioned above, Jordanian monarchs trace their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Disputes over Jerusalem that appear to circumscribe King Abdullah II’s role as guardian of the Islamic holy sites create a domestic political problem for the king. Jewish worship on the Mount/Haram is prohibited under a long-standing “status quo” arrangement that dates back to the era of Ottoman control during the centuries before World War I.

Some Israeli actions appear to be aimed at reducing tensions with Jordan. On January 24, 2023, Prime Minister Netanyahu traveled to Jordan for talks with King Abdullah II in a visit that had not been previously announced publicly. According to statements by the Israeli government, the two discussed regional security issues and Israeli-Jordanian cooperation; Jordanian statements affirmed that the King stressed the “importance of respecting the historical and legal status quo in Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.”⁴⁴ In March 2023, the Israeli Foreign Ministry announced that “Israel is committed to maintaining the status quo, freedom of worship for all and preventing any escalation, along with maintaining Israel’s right to protect its citizens.”⁴⁵

Moreover, amidst ongoing Israeli-Palestinian violence in the West Bank and Israeli plans to construct additional West Bank settlements, Jordan has joined multilateral efforts to de-escalate tensions. In February 2023, the United States, Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA), Jordan, and Egypt issued a communique from Aqaba, Jordan aimed at de-escalating tensions and violence by committing Israel and the PA to suspend unilateral measures for a few months.⁴⁶ After the communique’s release, the White House issued a press release thanking King Abdullah II for “convening this historic gathering.”⁴⁷ The five parties reconvened the following month in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, and restated the Aqaba commitments.⁴⁸

Throughout April 2023, several events strained the bilateral Israeli-Jordanian relationship, such as:

- King Abdullah II spoke to a visiting Palestinian delegation led by PA President Mahmoud Abbas. In his speech, he “stressed that it is the duty of every Muslim to deter Israeli escalations against Islamic and Christian holy sites in

⁴² For more information on Jerusalem and its holy sites, see CRS Report RL33476, *Israel: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

⁴³ Article 9, Clause 2, of the peace treaty says that “Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem. When negotiations on the permanent status will take place, Israel will give high priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines.” In 2013, the PLO reaffirmed in a bilateral agreement with Jordan that the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan will continue to serve as the “Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem,” a title that successive Jordanian monarchs have used since 1924.

⁴⁴ The Royal Hashemite Court (@RHCJO), Twitter post, January 24, 2023, 8:30 a.m., available at <https://twitter.com/RHCJO/status/1617877490940379137>.

⁴⁵ Tova Lazaroff, “Israel is committed to Temple Mount status quo, it assures foreign envoys,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 21, 2023.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Aqaba Joint Communique,” media note, February 26, 2023.

⁴⁷ The White House, “Statement from National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan Welcoming the Aqaba Meeting and Communique,” press release, February 26, 2023.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Joint Communique from the March 19 meeting in Sharm El Sheikh,” media note, March 19, 2023.

Jerusalem...”⁴⁹ One U.S. think tank, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), accused the king of “engaging in rhetoric that might be popular among certain swaths of Jordanian society but could ultimately undermine the vital ties with Israel that keep Jordan safe and stable.”⁵⁰

- Israeli police entered Al Aqsa Mosque (normally the exclusive province of Muslims) on Jerusalem’s Mount/Haram to eject Palestinians who had barricaded themselves inside overnight—some reportedly with rocks, fireworks, and improvised explosives. The force used by the police against Palestinian worshippers and the arrests of hundreds prompted strong negative reactions and statements of concern from several regional and international actors, including Jordan. After the arrests, a Jordanian Foreign Ministry spokesperson warned Israel that should police “assault worshipers again, in an attempt to empty [the mosque] of worshipers, in preparation for major incursions into the mosque,” it would, “push the situation towards more tension and violence, for which everyone will pay the price...”⁵¹
- Israel arrested Imad al Adwan, an elected member of Jordan’s parliament, at the Allenby border crossing on suspicion of arms smuggling. At the time of his arrest, Israeli authorities confiscated 12 rifles and 194 pistols in his car. Al Adwan has been subsequently released by Israel and returned to Jordan, where he will stand trial after parliament voted to strip him of immunity from prosecution.⁵² In public remarks, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen did not hold the Jordanian government responsible for Adwan’s action, describing it as a “foolhardy criminal act.”⁵³

Water Scarcity and Regional Water Cooperation

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Jordan is the second-most water poor nation in the world in terms of water resources per inhabitant.⁵⁴ Jordan’s increase in water scarcity over the past 75 years is attributable to population growth, a decrease in the flow of the Yarmouk River due to the building of dams upstream in Syria, gradual declines in rainfall, and depleting groundwater resources due to overuse.⁵⁵ The illegal construction of thousands of private wells has also contributed to unsustainable groundwater extraction. The large influx of Syrian refugees has heightened water demand in the north. A Stanford University study predicts that dwindling water supplies and continued population growth will, without intervention, halve per capita water use in Jordan by the end of this century.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ “Jordan King Abdullah: Muslims have duty to protect Islamic, Christian holy sites from Israel persecution,” *Middle East Monitor* (MEMO), April 3, 2023.

⁵⁰ “Jordan’s King Incites Anti-Israel Sentiment,” Flash Brief, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, April 4, 2023.

⁵¹ Mohammed Tawfeeq and Jo Shelley, “Jordan warns Israel of ‘catastrophic consequences’ if al-Aqsa mosque stormed again,” *CNN*, April 8, 2023.

⁵² “Jordanian lawmaker charged for trying to smuggle over 200 guns into West Bank,” *Times of Israel*, May 17, 2023.

⁵³ “Jordanian lawmaker must face trial for weapon smuggling - Israel’s Cohen,” *Jerusalem Post*, April 24, 2023.

⁵⁴ United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, *Review of World Water Resources by Country*, 2003, available at <https://www.fao.org/3/Y4473E/y4473e00.htm#Contents>.

⁵⁵ Deepthi Rajsekhar and Steven M. Gorelick, “Increasing drought in Jordan: Climate Change and Cascading Syrian Land-Use Impacts on Reducing Transboundary Flow,” *Science Advances*, vol. 3, no. 8 (August 30, 2017).

⁵⁶ Josie Garthwaite, “Stanford Study Reveals a Deepening Water Crisis in Jordan—and a Way Forward,” *Stanford University News*, March 29, 2021.

Water Scarcity in Jordan

In Jordan, water scarcity is most acute in rural areas and in small villages and towns, a disparity with urban areas that has the potential for breeding resentment against the government. The agricultural sector uses 50% of the kingdom's water, but accounts only for 5.6% of its GDP. However, according to one analysis, if the government were to limit water usage for agricultural production, it would be considered "highly politically contentious."⁵⁷ In Jordan, many citizens already do not have access to constantly running water; instead, water is released to specific locales either weekly or monthly. Only those with means are able to purchase water storage tanks and water distributed privately by truck.⁵⁸

To secure new sources of water, Jordan is increasing its regional cooperation. In 2021, Israel agreed to sell Jordan 50 million cubic meters of additional water annually from the Sea of Galilee. Furthermore, Israel, Jordan, and the UAE reached a trilateral energy-for-water agreement in 2021, whereby the UAE is to finance additional solar production capacity in Jordan to be exported to Israel (600 megawatts) in exchange for 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water.⁵⁹ On November 22, 2021, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry traveled to the UAE for the signing ceremony of the energy-for-water deal, dubbed "Project Prosperity."

In November 2022, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, commonly referred to as COP27, Jordan and Israel signed their first environmental treaty since the 1994 peace treaty, pledging to mutually rehabilitate the Jordan River. In a "Joint Declaration of Intent," both sides agreed to (among other things):

- remove pollution sources in their respective territories by constructing wastewater treatment facilities;
- improve the quality of freshwater flows in the river in accordance with their respective plans;
- promote regional tourism with the view of generating additional employment opportunities in the region; and
- promote sustainable agriculture, including by controlling agricultural drainage and reducing the use of chemical pesticides.⁶⁰

Despite this agreement, one report notes that since its signing, the only progress on Jordan River rehabilitation has been made where "both river banks are located in Israel."⁶¹ The Jordanian government, in conjunction with faith-based organizations such as the Baptist World Alliance, are currently directing resources toward expanding tourism infrastructure at "Bethany Beyond The Jordan," a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site (2015) on the east bank of the Jordan River, which Christians believe to be the spot where Jesus was baptized.⁶²

⁵⁷ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Jordan's government warns of looming water crisis," July 28, 2022.

⁵⁸ Karen Zraick, "Jordan Is Running Out of Water, a Grim Glimpse of the Future," *New York Times*, November 9, 2022.

⁵⁹ The UAE's Masdar renewable energy company is one of the primary investors in renewable energy in Jordan. To date, Masdar has helped construct the 117-megawatt Tafila Wind Farm and the 200-megawatt Baynouna Solar Power plant. See Masdar, "Masdar Inaugurates 200MW Baynouna Solar Park, the Largest of Its Kind in Jordan," February 25, 2023.

⁶⁰ Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection, "Joining forces to address climate change impact: Israel and Jordan to cooperate on Jordan River restoration," November 17, 2022.

⁶¹ Sue Serkes, "Quietly, a stretch of the Jordan River is being cleaned up and transformed," *Times of Israel*, March 11, 2023.

⁶² "Jordan eyes tourism bonanza in expansion of Jesus' baptism site," Reuters, December 14, 2022.

Figure 4. Israeli and Jordanian Ministers Sign Jordan River Agreement

Source: Twitter, then-Israeli Environmental Protection Minister Tamar Zandberg, November 17, 2022, 5:46 a.m.

Jordan also is pursuing domestic water development projects. In July 2021, after years of delays in evaluating the now-defunct trilateral project (Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Authority) known as the Red-Dead Sea Conveyance Project, Jordan moved ahead with plans to build its own desalination plant in Aqaba, along with a water treatment facility, pumping station, and a 280-mile pipeline to carry water to Amman and elsewhere. The aim of the Aqaba-Amman Water Desalination and Conveyance Project (AAWDCP) is to bring 300 million cubic meters of potable water annually to water-stressed areas. The Jordanian government is currently evaluating private company bids for the \$2.5 billion project. USAID and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have provided funding to conduct feasibility studies.⁶³ According to USAID, the U.S. government has provided over \$10 million in technical support to the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation to study the feasibility of the AAWDCP; over the next five years, the United States government has pledged \$700 million, with \$300 million in grant funding from USAID, subject to the availability of funds, and up to \$400 million in loans to the project company from the U.S. Development Finance Corporation, subject to bankability requirements.⁶⁴

Syria

In March 2023, the conflict in Syria—involving the Syrian government and its partners, and various opposition and extremist groups, and a number of international actors—marked its twelfth year. Analysts estimate that the conflict has killed over half a million people (including combatants) and displaced half of Syria’s prewar population of 22 million. For Jordan, the ongoing civil war in Syria has created unstable conditions along portions of the 225-mile

⁶³ USAID, *Jordan Water Infrastructure, Annual Progress Report, Period 12th—July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021*, July 15, 2021, available at https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00XM3M.pdf.

⁶⁴ CRS Correspondence with USAID, April 2022.

Jordanian-Syrian border, where criminal networks smuggle synthetic drugs into Jordan and Iranian-backed militias, such as Hezbollah, attempt to gain influence. For the past several years, Syrian-based synthetic drug smugglers have routinely attempted to penetrate Jordan's borders and traffic Captagon pills. Captagon (the drug compound fenethylamine hydrochloride) is a popular and cheap amphetamine-type stimulant used across the Middle East.

Despite the lack of resolution to the Syria conflict and the persistence of the Asad government, Jordan (along with other Arab states) has normalized diplomatic relations with the Asad government, possibly reflecting the Jordanian government's judgement that Asad appears to have largely prevailed in the conflict against opposition forces. Jordan also may have been following the lead of Saudi Arabia, which, according to one report, "played a key role in pushing for Syria's return to the Arab League."⁶⁵

Prior to 2023, Jordan had been slowly reengaging with Syria. Though King Abdullah II was the first Arab leader to openly call for Syrian President Bashar al Asad's resignation in November 2011, since the Asad regime reclaimed control of southern Syria (with the help of Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah) around 2018, Jordan had sought to return to normal bilateral ties. Along the kingdom's northern border with Syria, many Jordanian residents share familial ties with Syrian families. In 2018, Jordan and Syria opened the Nasib/Jaber border crossing to facilitate greater bilateral trade and economic relations. In 2021, King Abdullah II received his first reported phone call from President Asad in over a decade.

Despite the Asad regime's broader acceptance by fellow Arab states, Jordan continues to seek assurances from Syria that it intends to crack down against the Captagon trade. In May 2023, one day after the Arab League formally readmitted Syria, the Royal Jordanian Air Force conducted multiple air strikes inside Syrian territory, killing a major narcotics trafficker (and his family) and destroying a building that housed a drug factory reportedly linked to the Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah.⁶⁶ According to a report citing two anonymous Jordanian officials, "The strikes were a message to Damascus that it should not mistake Amman's resolve at time it was leading an Arab effort to end Syria's estrangement."⁶⁷ Since the airstrikes, Jordan also has downed several unmanned aerial vehicles carrying narcotics and weapons over Jordanian air space.⁶⁸

To counter Captagon smuggling, the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) have allocated more human and technological resources to enhance their Directorate of Border Security. In addition, the JAF has loosened rules of engagement for its soldiers to more forcefully engage smugglers.⁶⁹ Jordan also relies on longtime U.S. security assistance for its border security. Since 2009, the Jordan Border Security Program has helped Jordan secure its land borders by providing the JAF "forward-looking infrared cameras, surveillance radars, fencing sensors, and intrusion detection devices."⁷⁰

In October 2022, Jordan's Public Security Directorate (PSD) signed an agreement with the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) to strengthen

⁶⁵ Kareem Chehayeb and Abby Sewell, "What's behind Syria's return to the Arab League?" Associated Press, May 8, 2023.

⁶⁶ "Jordan strikes Iran-linked drugs factory in southern Syria – sources," Reuters, May 8, 2023.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Jordan says it downs second drone from Syria this week," Reuters, June 16, 2023.

⁶⁹ Elliot Chapman, Shady Alkhayer, and Mohammed Najib, "Border busts: Jordanian authorities respond to Syrian drug trafficking groups," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 21, 2022.

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Inspector General, *Audit of Jordan Border Security Program Oversight*, December 20, 2019, available at <https://www.dodig.mil/Reports/Audits-and-Evaluations/Article/2046324/audit-of-jordan-border-security-program-oversight-dodig-2020-043/>.

cooperation on countering drug trafficking. The agreement commits both parties to sharing information, technology, and science related to tackling cross-border narcotics trafficking.⁷¹ In 2022, the Royal Jordanian Air Force received the first U.S. upgraded IOMAX Air Tractor AT-802 Border Patrol Aircraft (BPA).⁷² Nearly a decade ago, the UAE gifted six AT-802s to Jordan, and the United States is in the process of upgrading their capabilities to assist in patrolling and defending Jordan's borders.

The kingdom also continues to host hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, many of whom are reluctant to return to their homes for fear of Syrian regime retribution against them.⁷³ As of May 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 660,022 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Since 2011, the influx of Syrian refugees has placed tremendous strain on Jordan's government and local economies, especially in the northern governorates of Mafraq, Irbid, Ar Ramtha, and Zarqa. With the Syrian crisis now in its second decade, an entire generation of Syrian refugees are being raised in Jordan. In the Zaatari Refugee Camp in northern Jordan, home to about 11% of the registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, refugees have received food, shelter, and medical services, but now seek education and employment services.⁷⁴

U.S. Relations

Overview

U.S. officials frequently express their support for Jordan, citing its role in promoting Middle East peace, combatting terrorism, and serving as a refuge to displaced people. In February 2023, Vice President Kamala Harris hosted King Abdullah II at the White House, where the Vice President "reaffirmed the strength of the bilateral partnership and our commitment to Jordan's security and economic prosperity."⁷⁵ The Vice President also "underscored the importance of upholding the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, recognizing Jordan's crucial role as the custodian of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem and as a force for stability."⁷⁶ During her Senate confirmation hearing, Ambassador-designate to Jordan Yael Lempert, the current Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State at the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, testified that U.S. goals in Jordan are focused on "supporting economic growth, strengthening water security, and deepening our strong security cooperation."⁷⁷

U.S.-Jordanian Security Cooperation

U.S.-Jordanian security cooperation is arguably at the heart of the bilateral relationship. According to the U.S. State Department, the United States and Jordan have a 1996 Status of

⁷¹ Elliot Chapman, "US-Jordan agreement on combating drug smuggling likely to increase Jordanian intelligence and policing capabilities," *Jane's Country Risk Daily Report*, October 11, 2022.

⁷² Gareth Jennings, "Jordan to receive IOMAX-upgraded Air Tractor," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 21, 2022.

⁷³ "Trapped in Jordan, Syrian Refugees See No Way Home," Associated Press, September 11, 2019.

⁷⁴ Taylor Luck, "Not gone, but forgotten? Syrian refugees struggle to move forward," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 14, 2022.

⁷⁵ The White House, "Readout of Vice President Kamala Harris's Meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan," press release, February 2, 2023.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Statement of Yael Lempert, Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 4, 2023.

Forces Agreement, a 2006 Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, and a 2021 Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA).⁷⁸ The 2021 DCA formalizes years of U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation, which became more visible at the start of CJTF-OIR against the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIL/ISIS) in 2014. In September 2022, the United States and Jordan participated in the 10th iteration of Eager Lion, the largest multinational military exercise hosted by Jordan. According to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), “approximately 1,700 U.S. servicemembers, 2,200 Jordanian Armed Forces, and 591 coalition personnel from 28 other partner nations” participated or observed in Eager Lion 2022.⁷⁹

In June 2023, the U.S. Air Force deployed F-22 Raptors to U.S. Central Command’s area of responsibility in a demonstration of U.S. resolve in countering “increasingly unsafe and unprofessional behavior by Russian aircraft in the region.”⁸⁰

As of June 2023, there are approximately 2,936 United States military personnel deployed to Jordan to counter the Islamic State and enhance Jordan’s and regional security.⁸¹ Though the 2021 DCA governs U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation, the presence of armed U.S. military personnel in the kingdom remains a sensitive domestic issue in Jordanian politics.⁸² According to the 2021 agreement:

Jordan shall provide unimpeded access to and use of Agreed Facilities and Areas to U.S. forces, U.S. personnel, U.S. contractors, and others as mutually agreed, for activities including-visits; training; exercises; maneuvers; transit; support and related activities; refueling of aircraft; landing and recovery of aircraft; bunkering of vessels; temporary maintenance of vehicles, vessels, and aircraft; accommodation of personnel; communications; staging and deploying of forces and materiel; pre-positioning of equipment, supplies, and materiel; security assistance and cooperation activities; joint and combined training activities; humanitarian and disaster relief; contingency operations; and other activities as mutually agreed by the Parties or their Executive Agents.⁸³

According to one defense report, the 332nd Air Expeditionary Wing, which is officially located in “Southwest Asia” may be based in Jordan,⁸⁴ where it operates in support of CJTF-OIR against the Islamic State.⁸⁵ The wing operates combat aircraft, such as the F-15E and F-16C, transport and refueling aircraft, such as the HC-130P and KC-135R, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) unmanned craft, such as the MQ-9.⁸⁶

Jordanian air bases have been particularly important for the U.S. conduct of intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions in Syria and Iraq. U.S. forces have operated out of various Jordanian air bases, such as Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Azraq,

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Jordan,” fact sheet, May 21, 2021.

⁷⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, “U.S. Central Command, Jordan Hosts U.S. forces and partner nations for premiere Exercise Eager Lion,” September 4, 2022.

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, “U.S. Central Command, F-22 Raptors Demonstrate Air Superiority in CENTCOM,” June 14, 2023.

⁸¹ White House, “Letter to the Speaker of the House and President pro tempore of the Senate regarding the War Powers Report,” press release, June 8, 2023.

⁸² Saud al Sharafat, “Critics react to US-Jordan defense agreement,” *Al Monitor*, April 1, 2021.

⁸³ U.S. Department of State, *Agreement between the United States of America and Jordan with Exchange of Notes, Treaties and Other International Acts Series 21-317*, signed at Amman January 31, 2021, entered into force March 17, 2021.

⁸⁴ J.P. Lawrence, “Pentagon awards latest contract in \$265 million project to expand remote air base in Jordan,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 13, 2022.

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Air Force Central, “332nd Air Expeditionary Wing Fact Sheet.”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Jordan.⁸⁷ While the United States never officially acknowledged its presence at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base prior to the 2021 agreement, according to one report, “satellite imagery shows it has hosted US Air Force (USAF) unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and fast jets since at least 2016.”⁸⁸

Beyond the need to use Jordanian facilities to counter the Islamic State throughout the region, CENTCOM may seek to partner more closely with Jordan in order to position U.S. materiel to counter Iran. In summer 2021, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that equipment and materiel previously stored at a now-closed U.S. base in Qatar would be moved to Jordan.⁸⁹

The Case of Ahlam al Tamimi

Ahlam al Tamimi is a Jordanian national who was an accomplice in the 2001 suicide bombing of a Jerusalem pizza restaurant that killed 15 people, including two Americans. In Israel, she had been sentenced to life in prison but was released and returned to Jordan in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas. The U.S. Justice Department filed criminal charges against Tamimi in 2013, and those charges were unsealed in early 2017. Tamimi is on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Most Wanted Terrorist List.⁹⁰ The United States and Jordan have an extradition treaty, which, according to the U.S. State Department, entered into force on July 29, 1995.⁹¹ The United States requested Tamimi’s extradition in 2017, but Jordan’s Court of Cassation ruled that the extradition treaty was invalid. In November 2019, the State Department said that “the United States regards the extradition treaty as valid.”

According to an April 2021 media account, one reason why the U.S. and Israeli governments have not applied further visible pressure on the government of Jordan to extradite Tamimi is concern for the stability of Jordan.⁹² One unnamed U.S. State Department official noted that “while [King] Abdullah has no love for Tamimi, giving her up to America would put the king in a very difficult position with his own people.”⁹³ On March 23, 2022, six lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Blinken requesting responses to questions regarding why Jordan has not extradited Tamimi.⁹⁴ In July 2022, the U.S. National Security Council said that the “U.S. government continues to seek her extradition and the Government of Jordan’s assistance in bringing her to justice for her role in the heinous attack.”⁹⁵ During her recent confirmation hearing, U.S. Ambassador-designate to Jordan Yael Lempert remarked that “if confirmed, I will

⁸⁷ The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2018 (P.L. 115-91) authorized \$143 million in Air Force construction funds to expand the ramp space at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base.

⁸⁸ Jeremy Binnie, “US Carrying out Major Upgrade to Jordanian Airbase,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, December 1, 2021.

⁸⁹ J.P. Lawrence, “US Military Shifts Army Basing from Qatar to Jordan in Move that Could Provide Leverage against Iran,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 1, 2021.

⁹⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Most Wanted Terrorist: Ahlam Ahmad al-Tamimi,” available at https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/ahlam-ahmad-al-tamimi/@@download.pdf.

⁹¹ The kingdom’s courts have ruled that Al Tamimi cannot be extradited until such a treaty is endorsed by the Jordanian parliament.

⁹² Yonah Jeremy Bob, “Justice Ignored,” *Jerusalem Post*, April 30, 2021.

⁹³ Op. cit.

⁹⁴ Congressman Greg Steube (@RepGregSteube), Twitter post, March 24, 2022, 10:36 a.m., available at <https://twitter.com/RepGregSteube/status/1507003370254520321?s=20>.

⁹⁵ “US seeks extradition of Palestinian attacker in Jordan,” Associated Press, July 11, 2022.

do everything in my power to ensure that Ahlam al Tamimi faces justice in the United States for her horrific crimes.”⁹⁶

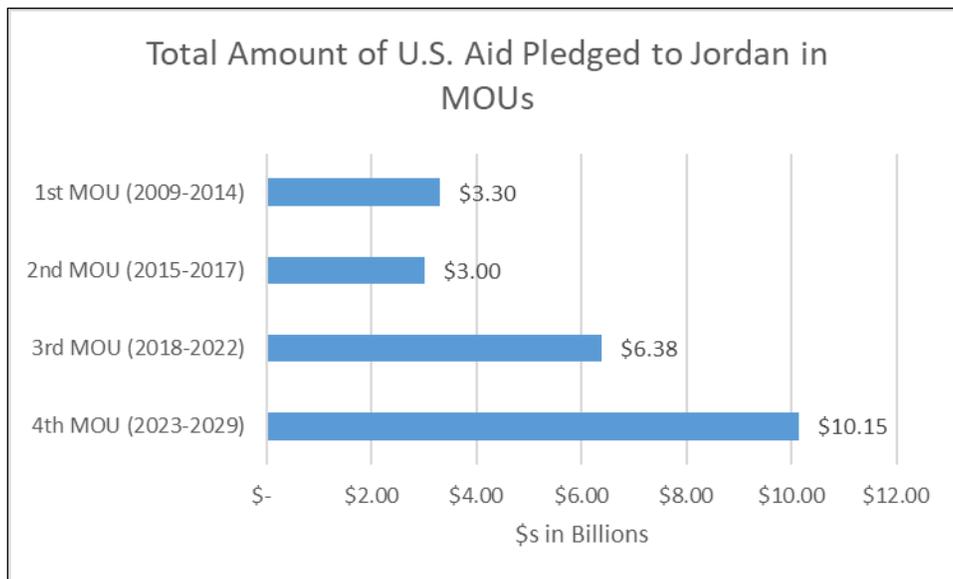
U.S. Foreign Assistance to Jordan

The United States has provided economic and military aid to Jordan since 1951 and 1957, respectively. Total bilateral U.S. aid (overseen by the Departments of State and Defense) to Jordan through FY2020 amounted to approximately \$26.4 billion. Jordan also has received over \$1.9 billion in additional military aid since FY2015, channeled through the Defense Department’s various security assistance accounts. U.S. assistance to Jordan accounts for over 40% of the total amount of official aid the kingdom receives annually. Many U.S. policymakers advocate for continued robust U.S. assistance to the kingdom. Annual aid to Jordan has tripled in historical terms over the past 15 years.

U.S.-Jordanian Agreement on Foreign Assistance

On September 16, 2022, the United States and Jordan signed their fourth Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) governing U.S. foreign aid to Jordan. The seven-year agreement (FY2023-FY2029), subject to appropriations of Congress, commits the Administration to seeking a total of \$1.45 billion in annual economic and military aid for Jordan. When compared to the previous MOU, this fourth MOU is 13.7% higher annually and lasts for seven fiscal years instead of five. It represents the largest multi-year U.S. foreign assistance commitment (\$10.15 billion over seven years) to the kingdom. Congress has appropriated between \$1.5 billion and \$1.65 billion in total annual aid to Jordan since FY2018.

Figure 5. U.S. Aid to Jordan over Decades



Source: CRS Graphics.

Notes: Includes bilateral U.S. military and economic assistance only. Does not include funds administered by the U.S. Defense Department.

⁹⁶ CQ Congressional Transcripts, U.S. Congress, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, hearing on Pending Nominations, 118th Cong., 1st sess., May 4, 2023.

The new MOU is subdivided into four baskets of funds, including \$610 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) for direct U.S. budget support for the Jordanian government—the most of any country worldwide; \$400 million in Foreign Military Funds (FMF) for Jordanian Armed Forces to procure U.S. equipment; \$350 million in ESF for USAID programming; and \$75 million in “incentive” ESF to support Jordanian economic and public sector reforms.⁹⁷ Although the Jordanian media has described the new MOU as coming with “no strings attached” and the Biden Administration has been careful to discuss reforms stipulated in the new MOU as emanating from Jordan, the new agreement does call on Jordan to take specific steps with regard to its water sector and civil workforce.⁹⁸ According to Secretary of State Antony Blinken:

The MOU will support key reforms conceived of, and led by, King Abdullah’s government focusing on improving the lives of Jordanians in tangible ways, reforms like improving essential public services, tackling the water crisis, which is being exacerbated by climate change, expanding economic opportunities so that everyone in Jordan, including women, under-served groups can reach their full potential.⁹⁹

For FY2024, the Biden Administration is seeking a total of \$1.45 billion in assistance for Jordan in line with the MOU. According to the FY2024 CBJ, U.S. economic aid to Jordan will “advance the Government of Jordan’s (GoJ) economic reform agenda, mitigate the impacts of refugees from neighboring countries, and provide direct budget support to the GoJ for non-military expenditures, thereby decreasing the GoJ’s budget shortfalls.”¹⁰⁰

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Aid to Jordan: FY2020-FY2024 Request

In millions of current U.S. dollars

| Account | FY2020 Actual | FY2021 Actual | FY2022 Actual | FY2023 Enacted | FY2024 Request |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Development Assistance (DA) | — | 85.00 | — | — | — |
| Economic Support Fund (ESF) | 1,082.40 | 1,122.40 | 1,203.40 | 1,210.80 | 1,035.80 |
| Foreign Military Financing (FMF) | 425.00 | 425.00 | 425.00 | 425.00 | 400.00 |
| International Military Education and Training (IMET) | 4.00 | 4.00 | 1.95 | 3.80 | 3.80 |
| INCLE | — | — | 2.50 | — | 2.50 |
| Non-Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR) | 13.60 | 13.60 | 13.20 | 10.40 | 5.90 |
| Global Health Programs (GHP) | — | — | 4.00 | — | 2.00 |
| Total | 1,525.00 | 1,650.00 | 1,650.05 | 1,650.00 | 1,450.00 |

Sources: Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Congressional Budget Justifications (FY2021-FY2024) and CRS calculations and rounding.

⁹⁷ According to the text of the new MOU, the \$75 million in ESF incentive funds are “intended to be disbursed through modalities determined by the two governments.” See Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership between The Government of the United States of America and The Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

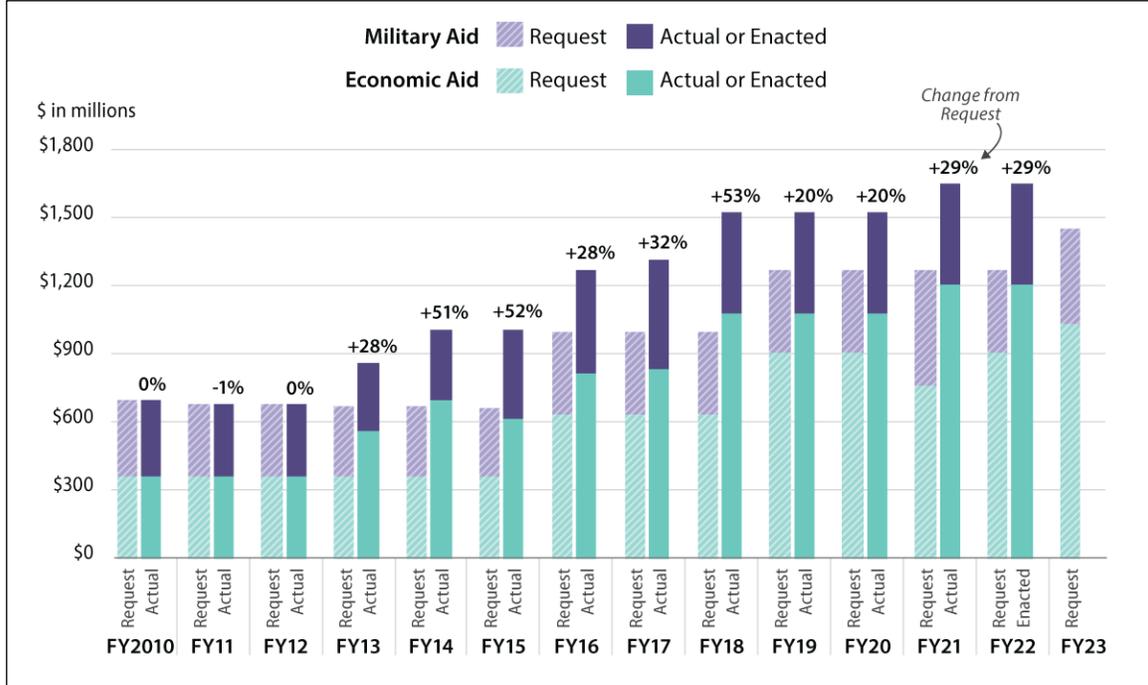
⁹⁸ Mohammad Ghazal, “No strings attached to \$10.15b US aid package to Jordan—ambassador,” *Jordan Times*, October 5, 2022.

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi at a Joint Press Availability,” press release, September 16, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Appendix 2*, Fiscal Year 2024, p. 286.

Notes: In FY2020 (P.L. 116-93), Congress permitted \$125 million in prior-year ESF to be made available for Jordan. Those funds are not included in this table.

Figure 6. State Department and USAID Assistance to Jordan, FY2010-FY2023
(Executive branch requests vs. actual allocations in millions of current dollars)



Source: Created by CRS using data from annual State Department Congressional Budget Justifications, legislation, and explanatory statements.

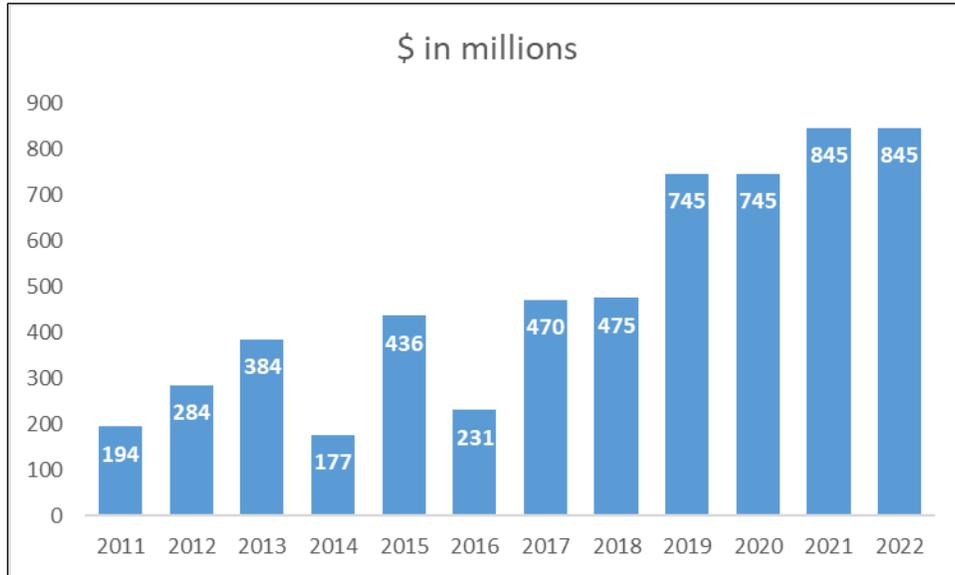
Notes: Economic aid from the following accounts: Economic Support Fund, and Food for Peace Act, Title II (P.L. 480). Military aid from the following accounts: Foreign Military Financing, International Military Education and Training (IMET), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), and Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR).

Economic Assistance

The United States provides economic aid to Jordan for (1) budgetary support (cash transfer), (2) USAID programs in Jordan, and (3) loan guarantees. As noted, the cash transfer portion of U.S. economic assistance to Jordan is the largest amount of budget support given to any U.S. foreign aid recipient worldwide.¹⁰¹ U.S. cash assistance is provided to help the kingdom with foreign debt payments, Syrian refugee support, and fuel import costs. (Jordan is almost entirely reliant on imports for its domestic energy needs.)

¹⁰¹ Other budget support aid recipients include the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau.

Figure 7. U.S. Cash Transfers to Jordan
(Obligated funds since 2011 in millions of dollars)



Source: Created by CRS with data from USAID Foreign Aid Explorer.

Humanitarian Assistance for Syrian Refugees in Jordan

The U.S. State Department estimates that, since large-scale U.S. aid to Syrian refugees began in FY2012, it has allocated \$2.2 billion in humanitarian assistance from global accounts for programs in Jordan to meet the needs of Syrian refugees and, indirectly, to ease the burden on Jordan. U.S. humanitarian assistance is provided both as cash assistance to refugees and through programs to meet their basic needs, such as child health care, education, water, and sanitation.

Military Assistance

U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation is a key component in bilateral relations. U.S. military assistance is primarily directed toward enabling the Jordanian military to procure and maintain U.S.-origin conventional weapons systems. U.S. and Jordanian officials have conducted 43 meetings of the U.S.-Jordan Joint Military Commission (JMC) in which high-level officers from both countries engage in discussions on enhancing cooperation and future procurement. Annual U.S. military aid represents at least 20% of Jordan's total military defense budget.¹⁰² According to the State Department, Jordan receives one of the largest allocations of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding worldwide, and IMET graduates in Jordan include "King Abdullah II, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Vice Chairman, the Air Force commander, the Special Forces commander, and numerous other commanders."¹⁰³

¹⁰² According to *Jane's*, Jordan's 2022 defense budget is \$2.17 billion. See *Jane's Defence Budgets*, Jordan, April 5, 2022.

¹⁰³ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Jordan," fact sheet, October 26, 2018.

Foreign Military Financing and DOD Security Assistance

FMF overseen by the State Department is designed to support the Jordanian armed forces' multiyear (usually five-year) procurement plans, while DOD-administered security assistance supports ad hoc defense systems to respond to immediate threats and other contingencies. FMF may be used to purchase new equipment (e.g., precision-guided munitions, night vision) or to sustain previous acquisitions (e.g., Blackhawk helicopters, AT-802 fixed-wing aircraft). FMF grants have enabled the Royal Jordanian Air Force to procure munitions for its F-16 fighter aircraft and a fleet of 31 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters.¹⁰⁴

Figure 8. U.S.-Supplied Black Hawk Helicopters for Jordan



Source: Jane's Defence Weekly.

In June 2022, the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF) signed a Letter of Acceptance (LOA) with Lockheed Martin to acquire eight F-16 Block 70/72 aircraft. In February 2022, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of the potential sale of up to 12 F-16 Block 70 fighters to Jordan estimated at \$4.21 billion. It is unclear whether the Biden Administration has granted Jordan the ability to finance the purchase over multiple years, which may be necessary given the cost of the proposed sale.¹⁰⁵ According to *Jane's World Air Forces*, the RJAF fields 43 F-16A and 18 F-16B Fighting Falcons, and it is in the process of upgrading its fleet.¹⁰⁶ In 2021, DSCA notified Congress of a potential Foreign Military Sale to Jordan of a \$60 million Lockheed Martin F-16 Air Combat Training Center.

As a result of the Syrian civil war and CJTF-OIR against the Islamic State, the United States has increased military aid to Jordan and channeled these increases through DOD-managed accounts (e.g., 333/1226/Coalition Support Funds). DOD assistance has helped finance the creation of the Jordan Border Security System, an integrated network of guard towers, surveillance cameras, and radar to guard the kingdom's borders with Syria and Iraq. According to CENTCOM correspondence with CRS, DOD funds support the maintenance and upgrades of UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters,

¹⁰⁴ Gareth Jennings, "US Contracts Black Hawk for Jordan's Royal Squadron," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 21, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Section 23 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. §276351) authorizes the President to finance the "procurement of defense articles, defense services, and design and construction services by friendly foreign countries and international organizations, on such terms and conditions as he may determine consistent with the requirements of this section."

¹⁰⁶ Gareth Jennings, "Jordan signs LOA for F-16 Block 70s," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 17, 2022.

reimbursement to the Royal Jordanian Air Force for flight time patrols and fuel in support of CJTF-OIR, and reimbursement for U.S. equipment Jordan needs to comply with CJTF-OIR technological requirements, such as friendly fire pods on F-16 fighters.¹⁰⁷

Excess Defense Articles

In 1996, the United States granted Jordan Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status, a designation that, among other things, makes Jordan eligible to receive excess U.S. defense articles, training, and loans of equipment for cooperative research and development.¹⁰⁸ In the past decade, the United States has provided \$83.3 million (current \$ value) in excess U.S. defense articles to Jordan, including three AH-1 Cobra Helicopters, 45 Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs), and M577A3 Tracked Command Post Carriers.¹⁰⁹

In December 2021, the United States Air Force, under C-130 Ramp-to-Ramp (R2R) transfer program, donated three C-130 transport aircraft to the Royal Jordanian Air Force. According to the U.S. Embassy in Amman, Jordan, “The transfer of the USAF C-130 aircraft boosts RJAF fixed wing tactical airlift capability by nearly 50% and saves RJAF approximately \$30 million in equipment renovation costs.”¹¹⁰

Table 2. U.S. Foreign Aid Obligations to Jordan: 1946-2020
(in millions of current dollars)

| Total Economic Assistance | Total Military Assistance | Total |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| \$17,201.700 | \$9,252.900 | \$26,454.600 |

Source: USAID Overseas Loans and Grants, July 1, 1945-September 30, 2020.

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¹⁰⁷ CRS Correspondence with CENTCOM officials, August 24, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ See “Presidential Determination No. 97-4 of November 12, 1996, Designation of Jordan as Major Non-NATO Ally,” 61 *Federal Register* 59809, November 25, 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, EDA DataBase Tool, accessed April 2022.

¹¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Embassy in Jordan, United States Air Force Transfers Three C-130 Aircraft to Royal Jordanian Air Force,” December 9, 2021.

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