

CLINTON BAILEY

JORDAN'S
PALESTINIAN
CHALLENGE
1948–1983

A POLITICAL HISTORY



Studies in International Politics,
The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations,
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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*Jordan's
Palestinian Challenge,
1948–1983:
(A Political History)*

Clinton Bailey

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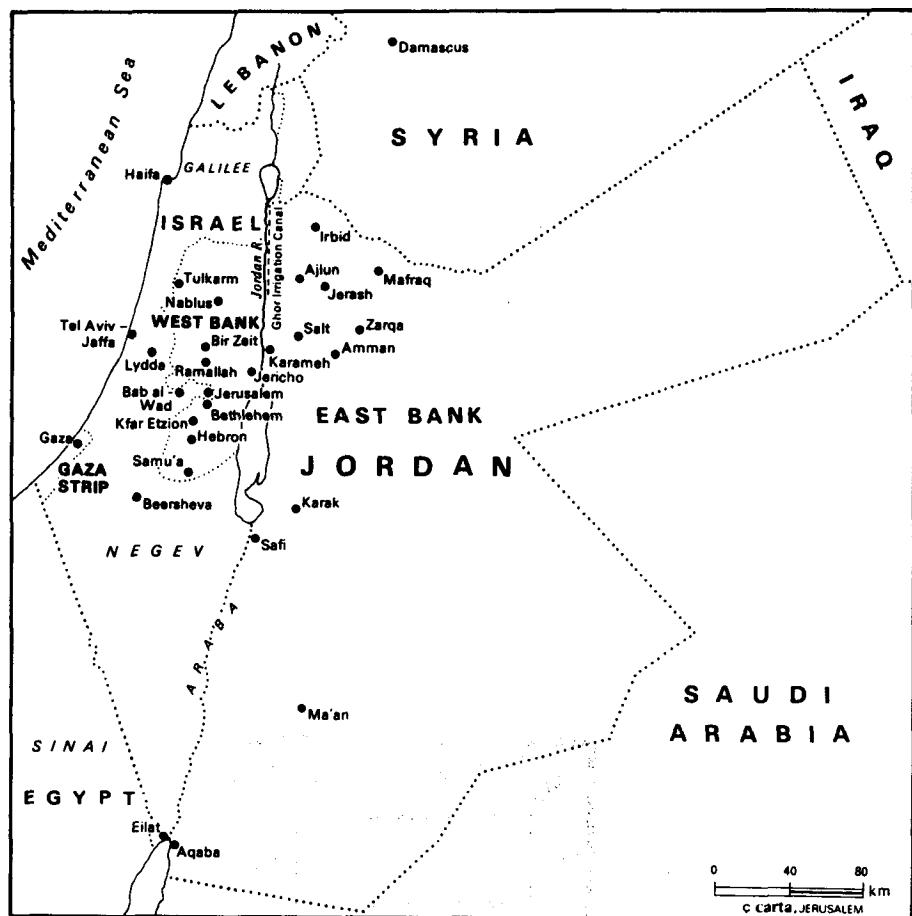
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Jordan's Palestinian Challenge, 1948-1983: A Political History

Clinton Bailey

Two-thirds of all Palestinians are Jordanian citizens living on the East and West Banks; a sizable number also reside and work in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula. With the questions of ultimate sovereignty over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip attracting much international attention since Israel's occupation of these areas in 1967, the solution to the Palestinian question is often seen as entirely dependent on Palestinian relations with Israel, despite the fact that only one-third of the Palestinians live in the occupied territories. In contrast, Palestinian relations with the Arab states, including Jordan, are generally portrayed as a sideshow to the main theater of conflict. This book examines the thirty-five-year struggle between the Hashimite monarchy and the forces of Palestinian nationalism over the future identity, and perhaps location, of those two-thirds of the Palestinian people who have been Jordanian subjects since 1948. Dr. Bailey bases his study on "open" sources: reports appearing in the Arab, Israeli, and world press, in addition to academic studies and published memoirs of persons involved in the events described, providing an accurate portrayal of the significant developments in Jordan's Palestinian challenge over the past thirty-five years.

Clinton Bailey was educated at Dartmouth College, The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Columbia University. Since 1973 he has taught in the Department of Middle East and African History at Tel Aviv University. His articles have appeared in leading academic journals dealing with the Middle East. He is also known for his studies of bedouin culture.



Jordan and Its Neighbors, 1983.

FOR MAYA
whose faith and generosity,
patience and attentions
throughout the many years
made this first book possible

Preface

Two-thirds of all Palestinians are Jordanian citizens. They live in what is known as the East Bank and the West Bank; a sizable number also reside and work in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Should Jordan eventually also assume responsibility for the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, 75 percent of all Palestinians will be Jordanian. As the question of ultimate sovereignty over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has attracted much international attention since Israel's occupation of these areas in 1967, the solution to the Palestinian question is often seen as entirely dependent on Palestinian relations with Israel—this despite the fact that only one-third of the Palestinians live in the occupied territories. By contrast, Palestinian relations with the Arab states, Jordan included, are generally portrayed, if at all, as a sideshow to the main theater of conflict.

The present study attempts to portray the thirty-five-year struggle between the Hashimite monarchy and the forces of Palestinian nationalism over the future identity, and perhaps location, of those two-thirds of the Palestinian people who have been Jordanian subjects since 1948. Indeed, this is the struggle that will determine the ultimate destiny of the Palestinians as a people.

The analysis in this study is based almost entirely on "open" sources: primarily on reports appearing in the Arab, Israeli, and world press, in addition to academic studies, published memoirs of people involved in the events described, and two or three journalistic accounts. To compensate for the limitations of my sources, I have applied to this study eighteen years of observation that began with a Ph.D. thesis and continued with a close scrutiny of information that appeared in the media, as well as many conversations held with people involved in the subject, either personally or academically. I feel that the study is an

accurate portrayal of the significant developments in Jordan's Palestinian challenge over the past thirty-five years.

This book would not have been written without the encouragement of two people. First and foremost is my spiritual father, Noah Jacobs, the philosopher and translator who, by example, taught me the meaning of integrity. He also taught me how to retain a sense of humor, even when dealing with the academic world. The second, Professor Uriel Dann, the historian, found value in my early perceptions of Jordanian politics and urged me to develop them. To both men my gratitude is herewith expressed.

The reader will note that (1) most Arabic names appearing in the text are transliterated as close to the Latin script equivalent as is possible without the use of many diacritical marks, which were deemed unnecessary for the Arabic reader and cumbersome for the non-Arabic reader; (2) a few names appear as they are commonly written in the U.S. press, such as Hussein (for Husayn), Assad (for Asad), and Gamal Abdul Nasser (for Jamal Abd al-Nasir); and (3) an apostrophe separating the letters of a word is to be understood as a glottal stop representing either the Arabic *alif* or the *ayin*.

Clinton Bailey
Jerusalem

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INTRODUCTION

The Hashimite-Palestinian Struggle

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations decided to partition British-mandated Palestine¹ and to create in its place two states, one Arab and the other Jewish. Two days later the Palestinian Arabs, in an effort to block the implementation of the UN resolution, began a civil war against the Jewish population by attacking intercity communications, outlying settlements, and public institutions.² Four months later, in April 1948, the Palestinian Jews counterattacked, and in the ensuing clashes the Palestinian Arab position collapsed. As a result, the leaders of five Arab states decided to send their armies into Palestine, each impelled by a variety of interests.³

One of these leaders was King Abdallah ibn al-Hussein al-Hashimi, who, in 1922, had come from Arabia to Transjordan, where he set up a state. Abdallah, believing his desert kingdom to be insufficient and convinced that his descent from the Prophet of Islam entitled him to

¹That is, the area west of the Jordan River and the Araba valley. The original area of mandated Palestine, entrusted to Great Britain by the League of Nations after World War I, also included the area east of the river that, in 1922, was given a special status as the Emirate of Transjordan and placed out of bounds for Jewish settlement.

²This campaign was described in detail by a Jordanian Army officer who helped organize it. See Abdallah al-Tall, *Karithat Filastin (The Calamity of Palestine)*. Cairo, 1959, pp. 3-10, 19-22, 98-102.

³See Yaakov Shimoni, "The Arabs and the Approaching War with Israel: 1945-1948" (in Hebrew), *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash* 12 (1962), pp. 189-211.

a more notable domain, was ambitious to expand it.⁴ Over the years he also feared that the nationalists who would come to power in a Palestinian Arab state, if it ever came into being, might cast an eye eastward toward Transjordan and undermine his throne. The king was therefore pleased when the end of the Palestine War, in 1949, found his army in control of all east-central Palestine, including the venerated Muslim shrines in the eastern part of Jerusalem. In 1950 he formally annexed this area (hence called "the West Bank") to Transjordan ("the East Bank"), renaming his kingdom Jordan.⁵ He duly granted citizenship to the 810,000 Palestinians who thereby came under his authority and who, by outnumbering his original Transjordanian subjects two to one, became the majority in Jordan's population.⁶

Whereas the kingdom of Transjordan had been a peaceful polity before 1948, with most of the population in favor of the monarchy, the kingdom of Jordan was to be characterized by unrest for at least twenty-three years. Until 1971 the Hashimite regime (Kings Abdallah and Hussein, their relatives, and the politicians who identified with them) had to struggle to maintain control of the country against Palestinian nationalists who felt that the new Palestinian majority should determine Jordan's policies, policies that they hoped would enhance the Palestinian cause.

Moreover, the political aspirations of the two contending camps were diametrically opposed. The primary aspiration of the Palestinian nationalists was to see Israel destroyed so that they, themselves, could establish an Arab government in the whole of Palestine and enable the Palestinian refugees to return to their former homes. To them, Jordan's strategic position along Israel's eastern border obliged it to play a central role in the realization of these aspirations. The extent to which Jordan

⁴King Abdallah's ambitions were expressed in his Greater Syria Project of 1943, which envisaged his dominion over Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. See Israel Gershuni, "King Abdallah's Concept of a 'Greater Syria,'" in A. Sinai and A. Pollack (eds.), *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the West Bank: A Handbook*. New York, 1977, pp. 139-147.

⁵King Abdallah engineered the annexation in three stages. On October 1, 1948, Palestinian notables met in Amman and declared that there could be no Palestinian government until Palestine was liberated. On December 1, 1948, a larger assembly of notables, meeting in Jericho, called for the unification of the East and West Banks under King Abdallah and for Palestinians to become members of Jordan's parliament. On April 24, 1950, a new Parliament approved the union of the two banks.

⁶International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [hereafter IBRD], *The Economic Development of Jordan*. Baltimore, 1957, p. 3.

assumed that role would determine the degree to which the very survival of the Hashimite regime was justified in Palestinian eyes. The primary aspiration of the Hashimite regime, on the other hand, was simply to rule, and, in its eyes, the country's *raison d'être* on both banks of the Jordan was to provide the territorial basis for that rule.

These respective aspirations of ruling, on the one hand, and "regaining" Palestine, on the other, proved impossible to reconcile, for what was beneficial to the one was detrimental to the other. For example, in order to finance its rule, the regime was dependent on grants from Great Britain and the United States, the only two powers sufficiently interested in the independent existence of the Hashimite monarchy to subsidize it. The Palestinian nationalists, however, objected to this financial dependence, believing that it enabled the two powers to influence Jordan's foreign and defense policies. They felt, in particular, that dependence on the West impelled Jordan to acquiesce with respect to the question of Israel's existence and to maintain quiet along the Israel-Jordan border. To Palestinian nationalists, the continual harassment of Israel over this border was essential in keeping their cause alive.

Whether or not the regime had an obligation to the powers that subsidized it, Jordan indeed adopted a policy of minimum confrontation with Israel designed to ensure that its rule would not be shaken by Israeli reprisal raids or by occupation, as eventually happened in the West Bank in 1967. Moreover, because of these conflicting attitudes on border policy, the regime sought to ensure that Jordan's army (often called the Arab Legion) was loyal and free from pro-Palestinian nationalist sympathies. It therefore recruited its important combat units mainly from dependable East Bank sections of the population—particularly from the bedouin and Circassians.⁷ Furthermore, to prevent the Palestinian majority from imposing their political aspirations on the country, the rulers limited Palestinian participation in the major national decisionmaking bodies, where Palestinians were never allowed to enjoy representation commensurate with their two-thirds' majority. In both houses of the Jordanian parliament, parity of representation between the East and West Banks was the basis for representation, whereas the West Bank was more populous until the mid-1960s, when elections were last held.⁸ East Bankers have also outnumbered Palestinians in almost all of

⁷Clinton Bailey, "The Participation of the Palestinians in the Politics of Jordan." Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1966, pp. 108–117.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 117–124.

the fifty or so Jordanian cabinets since 1950, and the longest of the three cabinets in which Palestinians actually constituted a majority served less than four months.⁹ Moreover, only four of Jordan's nineteen prime ministers have been Palestinians, serving terms of eight days, nine days, one month, and fifty-five days, respectively.¹⁰

In their struggle to control the political direction of Jordan, both sides have exhibited strengths and weaknesses. The regime has enjoyed the practical advantages of military power with which to coerce the Palestinian nationalists if they became otherwise uncontrollable, as well as the means to affect the average Palestinian's standard of living. The "weakness" of the Hashimite regime, on the other hand, has been its desire for recognition by its Palestinian subjects as a legitimate government, without which its rule would never be secure. It is this aspiration of the regime that has been the Palestinian nationalists' main source of strength, giving them the ability to restrain government policies. These policies were also restrained by the regime's desire not to appear to violate the inter-Arab consensus, which generally pronounced in support of Palestinian nationalist goals.

Until 1971 the prevailing pattern of regime-Palestinian relations was such that the Palestinian nationalist leadership would expose and publicize government policies considered detrimental to their cause—policies involving the curbing of armed infiltration into Israel, the maintenance of secret contacts with the Jewish state, or the adherence to Western political initiatives that sought to end the Arab-Israel conflict. The nationalist leaders would then organize Palestinian crowds to demonstrate, knowing that a protest demonstration equalled a declaration that the regime was not representing Palestinian aspirations and therefore was not legitimate. Fearful of leaving yet another scar on regime-Palestinian relations, the regime was always wary of situations that might provoke it to use force against Palestinians. Between 1950 and 1970, the regime thus withdrew many unpopular policies before they could strain these relations too far.

In order to further its dual aspirations of ruling and being considered legitimate, the Hashimite regime, from 1949 to 1971, pursued a policy

⁹The cabinets of Hussein Fakhri al-Khalidi (Apr. 15–24, 1957) and Wasfi al-Tall (Dec. 2, 1962 to Mar. 27, 1963; Dec. 22, 1966 to Mar. 4, 1967).

¹⁰Hussein Fakhri al-Khalidi (Apr. 15–24, 1957), General Muhammad Da'ud (Sept. 16–24, 1970), Ahmad Tuqan (Sept. 26 to Oct. 28, 1970), and Qasim al-Rimawi (Jul. 3 to Aug. 28, 1980). See Clinton Bailey, "Cabinet Formation in Jordan," in Sinai and Pollack, *Hashemite Kingdom*, pp. 102–113.

of moderate hostility toward Israel—moderate as a precaution against being destroyed by its western neighbor, but hostile as a precaution against being overthrown by the Palestinians. The history of the regime in this period may be seen primarily as a constant struggle to strike a balance between these tendencies, as the Hashimites and the Palestinian nationalists each looked forward to some decisively favorable turn of events. The nationalists, while constantly preoccupied with trying to prevent the regime from coming to terms with the existence of Israel, looked forward to a time when the regime would fall. The Hashimites, while trying to prevent the complete disaffection of the Palestinian population, looked forward to a time when these same Palestinians would have to accept their regime as the best they could get—and this would happen only after they realized that they would neither destroy Israel nor attain an independent state of their own.

After 1971, when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was expelled from the country, having operated in Jordan since 1967, certain changes took place in the Hashimite-Palestinian struggle. The regime, for its part, continued to anticipate that the Palestinians it had absorbed in 1948 would ultimately view Jordan as their homeland and the Hashimites as their legitimate rulers, whereas the Palestinians, especially in the East Bank, ceased to occupy themselves with antiregime activity. After twenty-three years of unrest, the Palestinians began to enjoy the stability and prosperity that characterized the Jordan of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Between 1971 and 1983, the Hashimites' struggle with the Palestinian nationalists was waged primarily with the PLO, which operated from Beirut—a struggle that while bitter, was diplomatic rather than violent. Ostensibly, this was a contest that would decide who would inherit the West Bank and the Gaza Strip when and if Israel relinquished them. For the Hashimites, however, the struggle concerned the East Bank as well; should a Palestinian state be established west of the Jordan River, the 1.2 million Palestinians who came to constitute the majority east of the river might be tempted to include Jordan as a part of it. To King Hussein and his regime, it was a struggle for life or death.

ONE

Jordan, 1948–1967

YEARS OF INSTABILITY, 1948–1961

During the thirteen years after it had annexed the West Bank, the monarchy in Jordan was constantly on the defensive, forever fighting for its life. This was a period of instability for the inexperienced and unconfident regime as it tried to contend with the bitterness of the defeated and displaced Palestinians, and with their hopes of replacing the monarchy with Nasserism. It was a period marked by frequent demonstrations and riots, as well as by the assassinations of King Abdallah (1951) and Prime Minister Hazza al-Majali (1960) and an attempted military coup d'état (1957).

The five years between the Palestine War, which ended in 1949, and the advent of Nasserism in 1954 were marked by the rise of a new Palestinian nationalist leadership that occupied itself with organizing a popular backing. Unlike the mufti of Jerusalem and his political associates of an older generation who had led the Palestinians to defeat and dispersion in 1948, the Palestinian leaders who emerged in the Jordanian context were young (in their twenties and thirties), Western educated, and modern in their thoughts on political organization and activity. Most of their political experience had been gained in the three years between the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Palestine War, when they were being groomed for future leadership by the veteran Palestinian politician, Musa al-Alami. Although their opportunity to lead the Palestinians in a Palestinian state was not realized by 1948, they were the only group available to provide effective nationalist leadership when they became subjects of the Hashimite kingdom of Jordan.¹¹ All the former Palestinian leaders had fled abroad with the mufti.

¹¹For more detail on the following, see Bailey, *Participation*, pp. 125–203.