

Jordan on the Brink, 1955-57:  
*Britain, America, and the Survival of the Jordanian  
Monarchy*

A thesis

submitted by

Jesse R. Weinberg

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Advisor, Hugh Roberts

## Abstract

This paper will examine the dramatic changes in Jordanian politics from 1955 to 1957. Jordan, as a state created in the aftermath of the First World War, as a British backed client monarchy, without any unified political or cultural identity was extremely susceptible to the subversive influences of Arab Nationalism, and more specifically Nasserism during the 1950's. As a result, Jordan was placed in the middle of two linked conflicts, the Arab Cold War, between Gamal Abdel Nasser and his allies on the one hand and the pro-Western Arab monarchies on the other, and the wider Cold War, between the West and the Soviet Union.

My thesis will look at the international influences in domestic Jordanian politics, and the Jordanian domestic response, which coincided with the decline of British power in the Middle East, and the rise of Arab nationalism, specifically emanating from Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, reaching its apogee after the Suez Crisis. With the ascent to power of the young King Hussein, Jordan found itself in a vulnerable geopolitical position as Jordanian public opinion turned against the monarchy's patron, Britain, after the calamitous events surrounding Jordan's failed entry to the Baghdad Pact and the Suez Crisis. In response, King Hussein was forced to perform a balancing act, asserting Jordanian independence by firing the longtime commander of the Arab Legion, John Glubb, and deftly navigating between the rising Arab nationalist tide and potential threats to his rule, enhancing Jordan's strategic position by entering into an alliance with the United States, at the expense of declining British power. The development and enhancement of King Hussein's power secured Jordan's political stability, and ushered in

the state as an important bulwark against the spread of communism and Arab nationalism throughout the Cold War.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to provide a complex analysis of the changes within Jordanian politics and its strategic orientation between 1955 and 1957. These years, while especially eventful in the development within a regional context of anti-imperial Arab nationalism, in reaction to longstanding European influence, also played an important role in the development of internal politics, especially in Jordan. The case of European, and specifically British influence is of specific importance within the development of the Jordanian polity, and the subsequent political changes in the 1950's. The British scholar of Middle Eastern and Jordanian politics Phillip Robins writes in his sweeping book *A History of Jordan* observing that,

“the Jordan of the 1950's was a state suffering from terminal illness. Its origins were seen as anachronistic; its institutions brittle and vulnerable; its leadership inexperienced and uncertain and its internal political consensus lost forever. The prognosis was either for radical revolution or the swallowing up of Jordan by a larger Arab entity, either Egypt, Syria, Iraq or a combination thereof. Neither, of course, took place. The state, created and nurtured by the British, proved to be more resilient than anticipated, especially its coercive core.”<sup>1</sup>

Robins rightly observes and describes the Jordanian political predicament in the 1950's. However, this thesis will aim to give a greater understanding of the intersection of international events, and their effect on the decision-making and internal politics within Jordan. It will also aim to answer an even broader question: why was King Hussein able to survive, and Jordan able to remain a politically intact polity, where others in the region were susceptible and eventually succumbed to the tidal wave of Arab nationalism? While there has been considerable literature written on Jordan, and specifically on King Hussein, in the vein of well-written political biographies by historians such as Avi Shlaim

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Robbins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79.

and Nigel Ashton, this thesis will aim to bridge both the international and domestic aspects within Jordanian politics focusing on how international events changed the internal Jordanian political landscape.

The construction of the Hashemite Monarchy of Jordan was not born out of a unified national or cultural identity, but instead in the diplomatic back channels during and following the First World War. Created as a kingdom for the Hashemite Prince Abdullah, a secondary player in the Arab Revolt organized by his younger brother Faisal and the famed T.E. Lawrence, Jordan was formed out of what was the southern part of the former Ottoman province of Syria. Abdullah's rule with the help of Britain, consolidated power behind the monarchy, creating a civil bureaucracy staffed primarily with Palestinians, Hejazis, Syrians, and Circassians, buoyed by the British controlled military force known as the Arab Legion. The Arab Legion cemented Hashemite control over Jordan, establishing the allegiance of the previously restive Bedouin tribes to the monarch. Under the command of John Glubb the Arab Legion proved itself to be a highly professional and capable fighting force, performing admirably during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. However after 1948, Jordan's annexation of the West Bank changed the composition of the state with the absorption of the Palestinian population who were much more radical in their political outlook and who saw the Hashemite monarchy as "being Britain's clients, planted in Jordan to divide the Arab world and cooperate with the Zionists against the Palestinians."<sup>2</sup> With the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser, following the Free Officers coup in 1952, Nasser projected a strong anti-imperialist and Arab nationalist stance, which resonated among large portions of Jordan's population, wanting

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<sup>2</sup> Avi Shlaim. *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 77.



to see the end of Western, and specifically British influence in Jordan. Nasser's strong anti-imperialist stance had reverberations within Jordanian political life, as the young King Hussein ascended to the throne in 1953, following the incapacitation of his father, King Talal. Hussein was left with a country in crisis, when he was himself untested politically and wholly reliant on British patronage.

Because of Britain's involvement in the creation and maintenance of the Jordanian state, it is necessary to assess Jordanian politics through the prism of international events. Generally regarded as a pliable, pro-western state within Middle Eastern politics, Jordan's journey from a British client that could have become Arab nationalist and a Soviet ally, to an American-allied state, was far from smooth. Jordan's role as within both regional and international politics placed it in the middle of the larger Cold War struggle against the spread of Soviet influence, as well as an active player in the Arab struggle between Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt and those opposed to his populist anti-imperialist Arab nationalism. The precipitous decline of the British Empire during the early years of the Cold War, and its last gasp attempt to maintain hegemony within the Middle East, had a profound impact as well. Many within Whitehall operated under the assumption that British power was still preeminent in the region: however, their position was challenged by the rise of Arab nationalism, coupled with the aftereffects and financial burden which followed the conclusion of the Second World War, forcing Britain to accept criticism of their imperial designs and power projection throughout the region from the ascendant United States.

Britain was able to negotiate an advantageous Anglo-Jordanian agreement in 1948, which secured its interests in Jordan, allowing it under the new Anglo-Jordanian

treaty, to be responsible for the defense of Jordan and for the principal funding of the Arab Legion. When King Hussein ascended to the throne, he faced increasing anti-British pressure from forces within Jordan, influenced by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Hussein had a choice: either continue the longstanding alliance with Britain, a declining power, or hold onto power at the expense of its British alliance. Britain tried to retain its influence, in a region it had long dominated, and strove to keep anti-imperial nationalist movements out of power.

In this thesis, I will examine the evolution of Jordanian politics and the influence and impact of strategic developments in the Middle East. The West's worries about the spread of Communism and the rise of Arab nationalism underscored the importance of Jordan within the regional and global contexts of the Cold War. Because of domestic opposition to the British backing for the Hashemite monarchy, King Hussein balanced popular support of Arab nationalism, while freeing Jordan from British control, securing its interests through an American alliance, and playing to American fears of Soviet and Nasserist expansion in the Middle East. My research will focus on British and American diplomatic primary sources, from the Foreign Office and State Department records, as well as King Hussein's memoirs, analyzing the views of the British and American policy makers, and the evolution of King Hussein's decision making. While much has been written about the Arab Cold War, and the battle between the Nasser and his allies and his Western-backed opponents, a paucity of scholarship has focused on how Jordan stemmed the tide of Arab nationalism that would eventually engulf the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq in 1958. This thesis will assess King Hussein's strategy of navigating the internal Arab nationalist challenge, while utilizing the changing regional hegemony in

the Middle East to strike an advantageous deal with the ascendant United States. The analysis of the turbulent mid 1950's in Jordan gives greater insight into the consolidation of power of the Jordanian monarchy and the evolution of an important western-ally. My first chapter will focus on the impact of Western Cold War strategy in 1955, namely the development of the Baghdad Pact and the regional and domestic Jordanian responses to it. This will be followed chronologically by 1956, which saw the changing of Jordan's domestic realities, with the rise of internal Arab nationalism, and the challenges to and weakening of Hashemite dominance within Jordan, through the influence of international events and actors. The chapter will also analyze the intersection of domestic and international events, namely firing of John Glubb from his command of the Arab Legion, changes in Anglo-Jordanian relations following Jordan's inability to join the Baghdad Pact, and Britain's fateful intervention in the Suez Crisis. Finally, my last chapter will focus on the events of 1957, discussing how King Hussein was able to marginalize political opposition in his government, and how events in the Cold War, specifically the rise of the United States, replacing Britain as the main Middle Eastern hegemon, allowed Hussein to both assert control over restive elements in Jordan, and secure economic and military aid, leading to the consolidation of monarchical power in Jordan.

## Chapter II: The Baghdad Pact and the Rise of Nasser: Jordan in 1955

In 1955, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan stood as a British created entity in the rising tide of Arab nationalism. With the rise of Egypt's charismatic leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, Jordan's longstanding ties with their patron, Great Britain became under threat by those who advocated for greater Arab independence in the face of Western colonialism. From the West's perspective, the Middle East was viewed through the prism of the struggle against Soviet-backed communism and the need to contain its spread. As a result, the context of cold war geopolitics and its immediate consequence the formation of the Baghdad Pact, to which Nasser's Egypt and its Arab nationalist allies were strongly opposed, placed Jordan an exceptionally difficult position between the rising tide of Arab nationalism and the need for the Hashemite monarchy to have strong western support.

When the young King Hussein ascended to the Jordanian throne in 1953, he was young, inexperienced, and thrust into a complex geopolitical situation. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the British terminated, Transjordan's status as a mandate and granted it independence as the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan in March 1946. British power, while precipitously declining in the years after World War II with the rise of American global power, still remained in Jordan through the agreements of the 1948 Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, negotiated by Hussein's grandfather the founding monarch of Jordan, the late King Abdullah. The renegotiation of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty in 1948, which in practice maintained Jordanian independence, also gave the British control large aspects of Jordan's security and defense, through the presence of British officers commanding the Arab Legion and the maintenance of Royal Air Force (RAF) airbases.

The Anglo-Jordanian Treaty was “formed on the basis of a mutual defense pact, and Article 3 stated that if one side became engaged in a war, the other would immediately come to his aid as a means of collective defense.”<sup>1</sup> The Treaty also required Jordan to “provide military facilities in wartime, to develop lines of communication, and to allow for the Royal Air Force (RAF) to maintain airfields in Jordan.”<sup>2</sup> This allowed Britain to maintain a strategic foothold within the region and allow for the potential defense of the Suez Canal from a Soviet invasion with the ability of British troops to move from Jordan, westward to thwart an attack. The status of the Arab Legion was also cemented as John Glubb, the commander, was allowed to stay on. The retention of British influence, plus Britain’s annual subsidy of over 10 million pounds for Jordan, created the view that the Hashemites were just British clients, “planted in Jordan to divide the Arab world and cooperate with the Zionists against the Palestinians.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Hashemite monarchy, and by default, King Hussein, were faced with a considerable image problem. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which cemented the existence of the Jewish state of Israel, created problems for the Jordanian state, as they annexed the Palestinian-populated West Bank. Jordan’s close relations with the British were viewed negatively by the large Palestinian population who believed that the Hashemites were traitors to the Arab cause, for their perceived willingness to recognize the newly formed State of Israel.

Jordan’s internal affairs during the first year and a half of King Hussein’s rule were fraught with instability and King Hussein’s penchant for hiring and firing Jordanian Prime Ministers. Hussein’s first two Prime Ministers, Fawzi al-Mulki and Tawfiq al-

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<sup>1</sup> Tancred Bradshaw, *Britain and Jordan: Imperial Strategy, King Abdullah I and the Zionist Movement* (I.B. Tauris, 2012), 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>3</sup> Avi Shlaim. *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 77.

Huda, lasted one year each in power from May 1953 to May of 1955, but their brief periods at the helm were succeeded by three successive cabinet reshuffles. In Jordan, where domestic and regional politics were inextricably linked, and where the issue of Palestine remained an issue of national importance, “dumping a Prime Minister was a way of dissociating the king from a policy that had become unpopular and of appeasing the public.”<sup>4</sup> For King Hussein, the manipulation of public opinion to serve his interests was a practice that he would utilize throughout his reign, and especially during the fierce challenges to his rule. Hussein’s paramount interest was, and would remain, the safeguarding of the monarchy and the maintenance of the Hashemite dynasty in the throne of Jordan, even if it meant ending Jordan’s longstanding strategic alliance with Britain.

#### *Anglo-American Strategic Views and the Baghdad Pact*

Britain’s strategic objectives in the Middle East, and in Jordan in particular, were predicated on maintaining whatever control they could hold onto in the midst of their declining power. The main vehicle for the maintenance of British control in the Middle East was the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), more commonly referred to as the Baghdad Pact. The Baghdad Pact was supposed to protect the “northern tier” of the Middle East against potential Soviet military incursion and the expansion of pro-Soviet influence in the region. The British strategy for protecting the Middle East from Soviet influence harkened back to British defense strategy during the apogee of the Great Game against Czarist Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most basic level of British aid was the organization of military assistance to friendly regimes in the region. This meant at the state level, the “promotion of institutions designed to ensure cooperation between

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 77.

strategically important states in the region, and the apportioning of appropriate quantities of arms and military advice.”<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Britain wanted to expand its political interests throughout the region by trying to weaken Soviet influence, thus underscoring their political influence over friendly governments. This meant solidifying British economic interests in the region through the use of treaty relationships with countries in such as Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, which was especially important since the weakening British economy was heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil which had begun to dominate global oil markets, accounting for over 90 percent of global supply.<sup>6</sup>

The creation of the Baghdad Pact was met with support in Washington, which had generally deferred to the British on issues involving Middle Eastern policy; the American exceptions being the lucrative trade and defense relationships with the Saudi government and advancement of oil concessions in Iran. Therefore, American foreign policy was not predicated on maintaining influence in the region, as the United States did not have any longstanding ties, but was instead based on the larger global strategy of containment, stopping the spread of Soviet influence in the region. The formulation of the Baghdad Pact was based in part on the defense of the “Northern Tier,” stretching from the Black Sea, to the Khyber Pass, linking the strategic defenses of Pakistan, Iran and Turkey together in the pact. The idea for a “Northern Tier” defense was not initially British, but the brainchild of American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, but was built into the overall strategy of containment of Soviet influence. The Western defense pact was also complemented by another strategy aimed at resolving the crises in the Middle East, which was centered on the question of Israel and Palestine, known to policy makers in both

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<sup>5</sup> Nigel John Ashton, “The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-1958,” *Review of International Studies* 19, no.2 (April 1993): 124.

<sup>6</sup> Middle East Oil, 30/4/56, PRO F0371/121273 in Ashton 124.

Britain and the United States as the *Alpha Plan*. Britain, under Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden, who succeeded the retiring Winston Churchill in 1955, believed that “the Palestine problem was too poisonous to leave as it was, too destabilizing, too much of a temptation for ‘the Bear’ to create trouble.”<sup>7</sup> These two plans, the Northern Tier defense, and the Anglo-American *Alpha Plan* were meant to dovetail, but would eventually fall by the wayside with the creation of the Baghdad Pact.

The British were initially adamantly opposed to the idea of a “Northern Tier” defense framework, seeing it as a threat to their existing interests in the region, and specifically the exclusion of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq with which they had a defense pact that was up for renewal in 1957. The American’s, however, were adamantly opposed to any Iraqi involvement within the pact because of opposition from Egypt, now under the control of the new Free Officers regime and their leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser. American and British policy makers also believed Egypt with Nasser at the helm would be the key to any final status, regional agreement. Nasser had come to power in a coup, which overthrew the British-backed monarchy of King Farouk II in 1952, and reasserted Egypt’s independence and forced the withdrawal of British forces from the Suez Canal Zone in 1954. Nasser, who was inherently distrustful of monarchies, and British backed monarchies in particular, was being assiduously courted by the United States, who had tacitly supported his coup against the Egyptian monarchy. However, Nasser was adamantly opposed to the Anglo-American conception of a regional defense agreement that included Iraq believing that the inclusion of Iraq “would fracture Arab autonomy and solidarity, would split Iraq and ruin everything.”<sup>8</sup> The Eisenhower Administration, and

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 52.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 57.



in particular John Foster Dulles were therefore opposed to any sort of regional alliance which would include Iraq, governed by the Hashemites and their anglophile Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. However, in February of 1955, Iraq and Turkey signed a mutual defense pact, allowing the British to step in and renegotiate their own defense agreement with Iraq. It was under the auspices of this defense agreement, that the Baghdad Pact was created when Britain officially joined in April of 1955. With the signing of the Baghdad Pact and the inclusion of Iraq, the United States backed away from membership in the organization viewing it as “a vehicle for the renewal of British imperial influence and a source of regional instability.”<sup>9</sup> The signing of the Baghdad Pact also dealt a blow to the hopes of the *Alpha Plan*, which the British soon realized was diametrically opposed to their strategic objectives under the Baghdad Pact. The reaction of Egypt to the announcement of the Baghdad Pact would have widespread repercussions for regional stability. Nasser viewed the consummation of the Baghdad Pact as a direct threat to Egyptian independence and as an imperialist British plot to retain influence in the region. Nasser’s reaction to the Baghdad Pact was a culmination of both domestic and international pressures on Egypt. Nasser believed that collective security should be under the umbrella of the Arab League’s Arab Collective Security Pact (ACSP), the regional defense organization of the Arab League. Nasser found support from an unlikely spot, Saudi Arabia, who under King Saud also took hard line against any defense pact that would include the kingdom’s traditional rivals, namely the Hashemite Kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan. With Saudi support, Nasser was able to persuade the Syrian government under President Shukri al-Quwatli against aligning with Iraq and the British. In February of 1955, Nasser also had to deal with an explosive domestic situation, as Egypt was the

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<sup>9</sup> Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 46.

target of a massive Israeli reprisal raid in Egyptian controlled Gaza. Egyptian sponsored *Fedayeen* routinely raided settlements in southern Israel, but the Israeli Defense Force's response, known as Operation Black Arrow, commanded by then Colonel Ariel Sharon inflicted heavy casualties on Egyptian troops and "exposed the feebleness of Egypt's defense or—in an interpretation less damaging to Egyptian self respect—the culpability of the Western powers in leaving Egypt powerless against an aggressive enemy."<sup>10</sup> This exposure of Egypt's military weakness forced Nasser to up his rhetoric and go on the offensive, assailing the West and their preeminent ally, Iraq as well and drumming up Arab support against the Baghdad Pact. One of his most powerful tools was the radio station the *Sawat al-Arab*, known in English as the Voice of the Arabs, which broadcasted anti-western and Arab nationalist propaganda. Nasser's feelings were asserted in one memorable radio broadcast in which he proclaimed "every Arab realizes now the glaring fact that the West wants to settle in our lands forever. The West wants to remain the master of the world so it may colonize, enslave, and exploit it."<sup>11</sup> Nasser's rhetoric was soon matched by his actions as he drifted away from his contacts with the Americans and began to assert a neutral stance in practice to both the Americans and the Soviets, which culminated with his attendance at the first meeting of the Non-Aligned states in Bandung, Indonesia in April of 1955. In Indonesia, Nasser along with Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Zhou Enlai of China, and Sukarno of Indonesia reaffirmed the Third-World's independent stance between both the West and the Soviet Bloc. The Bandung Conference asserted Nasser as the preeminent statesman

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<sup>10</sup> Uriel Dann, *King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism: Jordan, 1955-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Postwar Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 197.

in the Arab world, combined with his increased visibility and exceptional charisma and led to a precipitous rise in his regional stature. The decisive battle on the Baghdad Pact and the future outcome of power alignment within the Middle East rested with Jordan, which stood between the two major forces within Middle Eastern politics, Nuri al-Said's western oriented Iraq, and Gamal Abdel Nasser's ascendant Egypt, leaving Jordan's untested King Hussein at the center of a political maelstrom.

*Jordan, the Pact, and the Ascendant Nasser*

King Hussein was initially inclined to side with Nasser against the Baghdad Pact, viewing the agreement as unfeasible in its ability to keep out Soviet influence. While he did believe in the concept of a "northern tier" defense against potential Soviet involvement in the Middle East, he was somewhat skeptical of its feasibility, writing in his autobiography "there was not much of a point having a northern tier if people could step over and build behind it."<sup>12</sup> Hussein was more amenable to a collective security pact amongst the Arab nations, which dealt with their perceived greatest threat, Israel, and not the Soviets. Hussein was particularly sensitive to domestic public opinion, particularly on the issue of Palestine and its centrality to the Arab narrative, realizing that overt support of the Baghdad Pact would have negative political implications for him at home. Regardless of Hussein's strategic views, the Egyptian media machine centered on the Voice of the Arabs radio station frequently assailed the Hashemite's in both Jordan and Iraq as imperialist pawns, but in reality, Jordan and Iraq were not linked by uniform views on policy. This lent itself to inter-Hashemite animosity between the Iraqi and Jordanian branches of the family. The Iraqi branch of the family frequently looked down

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<sup>12</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head: The Autobiography of His Majesty King Hussein I of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 83.

on their Jordanian counterparts, with Prince Talal, the nephew of King Hussein noting that, “there was a lot of tension between us. The Iraqis had a lot of money and they became Anglophiles and Westernized very quickly, while we had very little money even though we were the senior part of the family and remained much more Arab and Arabian.”<sup>13</sup> However, under the reign of the Iraqi King Faisal II, the Iraqi and Jordanian royal families’ animosity receded, but the Iraqi branch of the family remained avowedly pro-British in outlook. King Hussein utilized this thaw to mediate between the Iraqis and the Egyptians, and to try and bring the inter-Arab conflict over the Baghdad Pact to a resolution. In February of 1955, King Hussein travelled to both Baghdad and Cairo for meeting with the Iraqis and the Egyptians. In Baghdad, Hussein met with his cousin King Faisal II, but as he wrote in his memoirs, he had little to no influence on the affairs of state, which were controlled by Prime Minister Nuri al-Said. When Hussein met with Al-Said, asking him potentially to compromise on the issue of the Baghdad Pact, al-Said’s response was curt and to the point, telling Hussein, “Sir we are in the Baghdad Pact, that’s that, and we are certainly not backing out of it.”<sup>14</sup> His visit to Cairo proved equally uneventful, as he found President Nasser more open to general dialogue than the Iraqi premier but no less conciliatory towards lowering the tensions of the Baghdad Pact. In his first meeting with the Egyptian President, Hussein revealed that he was impressed with the Egyptian stating,

“I felt in those early days there was a new element in the Arab world, an element that could bring about much needed reforms... The problems of the Arab world are almost always the fault of its leaders and its politicians, not of the people, and so I had a lot of faith in Nasser and tried to support as much as I could.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 86.

<sup>15</sup> Hussein in Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 81-82.

Nasser, however refused to come to an accord with the Iraqis, seeing King Faisal II's and Nuri al-Said's adherence to the Baghdad Pact as a foregone conclusion, and taking into account al-Said's previous statements supporting entry to the pact, refused to stop his attacks on Iraq through his use of radio propaganda.

With the ascendant Egyptian power and the rise of Arab nationalism, Jordan's strategic position was tenuous. While supportive of an Arab League collective security pact, King Hussein still maintained close relations with the British, and remained intentionally neutral in dealings between both the British and their allies, and Nasser and his. The Jordanians neutrality was predicated on both domestic and international political considerations, aimed at still maintaining close relations with Britain, while offering verbal support to the rising tide of anti-western Arab nationalism as a means to placate the Jordanian people. The British Ambassador to Jordan, Sir Charles Duke described his view of Jordan's strategic orientation, observing that,

“Jordan continued to avoid a close alignment with either the Iraqi or the Egypto-Saudi factions in the Arab League. She aimed to obtain the maximum financial support from her Arab sister States, while allowing them a minimum influence on her policies. Her success in both of these areas was limited.”<sup>16</sup>

The British were also not immune to vacillating in their foreign policy strategy, especially with regards to Jordan joining the Baghdad Pact. Britain with its unique relationship with Jordan was initially unconcerned with a potential Jordanian entry to the Baghdad Pact as they already had previous security arrangements with the Jordanian government based on the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1948. However, Britain's strategic decline within the Middle East and the rise of Nasserism led to a reassessment of their relationship with Jordan with British policymakers viewing “the marked decline of

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<sup>16</sup> J.C.B. Richmond to Sir Anthony Eden, “Jordan: Annual Review for 1954,” 5 January 1955, FO 417 W1616 VJ 1011/1, PRO.

British influence in the country, and its susceptibility to the combined lure of Egyptian arms and Saudi money, soon led many in Whitehall to favor Jordan's adherence to the pact."<sup>17</sup> British hopes for potential Jordanian membership within the Baghdad Pact were also buoyed by the appointment, in May 1955 of Said al-Mufti as Prime Minister of Jordan. Mufti, a Circassian and a wealthy landlord, was considered to be a Hashemite loyalist, and an ally of the British, deeply distrustful of both the Arab nationalists and the Soviets, and as such, was seen as someone in favor of greater security cooperation between Britain and Jordan. British worries about their regional standing were intensified by the announcement in September 1955 of the momentous Czech arms deal, conducted between Nasser and the Eastern Bloc countries. Though Czechoslovakia was named as the primary arms supplier, the real power behind the deal was the Soviets. The Czech arms deal was an alarming event to the West, as the Egyptians under Nasser, who had shirked previous American arms offers, spurned them for the Soviets. While the American's had offered the Egyptians previous arms and aid deals, Nasser had deemed the American offer to be unacceptable, with unrealistic strings attached, such as the potential joining of the Baghdad Pact, and he was able to use the American offer to leverage a better deal from the Soviets. The symbolism of the deal was not lost to policymakers in both the West and the Arab world, as Nasser had singlehandedly broken the Western arms monopoly by giving the Soviets a foothold in the region. He also solidified his already ascendant position as the Arab world's most charismatic and powerful leader and was seen by many Arabs as being their greatest hope against Western interests and especially Israel. In Jordan, word of the Czech arms deal led to

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<sup>17</sup> Michael B. Oren, "A Winter of Discontent: Britain's Crisis in Jordan December 1955-March 1956" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, No.2 (May, 1990): 174.

exultations of support from both policymakers and laypersons alike with the Jordanian parliament cabling Cairo congratulations and even the conservative Prime Minister Said al-Mufti welcoming the move as a sign of greater Arab independence from the Western colonial powers. With the announcement of the arms deal, the Voice of the Arabs continued their assault on the airwaves with emotional appeals to the Jordanian people “calling on them to get rid of the British officers in the Army and the king who was keeping Jordan as a tool of the West.”<sup>18</sup> Nasser followed the signing of the Czech arms deal with the signing of defense pacts with both Syria and Saudi Arabia, leaving Jordan surrounded, and giving Egypt its own Arab counterweight to the Baghdad Pact.

#### *The Jordanian Courtship and Strategic Problems*

While King Hussein was sympathetic initially to Nasser’s ideas of Arab unity, he did not shift into the Nasserist camp, and was instead more interested in gaining more control from the British in Jordanian internal affairs. Jordan’s policy in discussions with the British was to demand greater control of their military and its financing. With elements within the Jordanian military increasingly unhappy with British control of their command structure, Hussein throughout 1955 had sought a renegotiation of the 1948 Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, that would provide for greater Jordanian control over their military as well as increased aid and, most importantly, give British military subsidies directly to the Jordanian government. The British had long thought that the giving of direct subsidies to the Arab Legion’s commander, Sir John Glubb was a sounder policy than letting the Jordanians manage their own finances. By giving the subsidy directly to Glubb, Whitehall believed that “it had ensured the accurate accounting and proper disbursement of the subsidy, that is, less graft and theft. London consistently rejected

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<sup>18</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 83.

any suggestion that the procedure might be an affront to Jordanian sensibilities and therefore deserved to be modified.”<sup>19</sup> Throughout their discussions in early 1955, the British asserted that they would allow the revision of the 1948 Treaty on the condition that Jordan joined the Baghdad Pact. In preliminary discussions with the British in February of 1955, the British responded to Jordanian discussion that collective Middle Eastern Defense,

“should be settled with the understanding and agreement of the Arab League states... Commenting on Her Majesty’s Government’s reply that revision of the treaty must await development of Middle East defense arrangements, he (Jordanian PM, Tawfiq Abu al-Huda) said that until the form of these arrangements (i.e. bilateral or collective agreements) had been settled, nothing final was possible and the Jordanian attitude depended on the outcome of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.”<sup>20</sup>

While the strategic outcome of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and its subsequent reconstitution as the regional Baghdad Pact did not change the impasse on the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, it was the announcement of the Czech arms deal which forced a reassessment of Jordan’s strategic position in the region. Hussein, who had seen the campaign of vilification between Hashemite Iraq and Nasser’s Egypt was not convinced that the military rewards of joining the Baghdad Pact would outweigh the potential domestic political costs. As a result, the Jordanians and King Hussein held fast to their neutral stance, with Hussein being intentionally evasive about the pact during meetings with his British counterparts. In a meeting in London in October of 1955, King Hussein asserted to Anthony Nutting, the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs that “he was trying to avoid getting committed to either rival groups in the Arab world... He made it plain that for these

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein: Jordan in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 99.

<sup>20</sup> J.C.B. Richmond to Harold Macmillan, “Anglo-Jordan Treaty,” 10 February 1955, FO 417 W1616, PRO.



reasons an early decision by Jordan to accede to the Pact was unlikely.”<sup>21</sup> Instead of the British, it was the Turks, under Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who took center stage, pushing the hardest for Jordan to join the Baghdad Pact. The Turks framed the Baghdad Pact and their own alliance with Jordan in strategic terms, arguing that an alliance with Turkey would secure Turkish support against Israel and provide Jordan with valuable military aid. The Turkish courting met its apogee with the visit in Amman of Turkish President Celal Bayar and Foreign Minister Fetim Zorlu on November 1, 1955. While initially billed as a routine international visit, the Turks tried to pressure the Jordanians into the Baghdad Pact. The Turkish visit came on the heels of another offer from Ankara for economic and military aid earlier in 1955, but which the Jordanian government ignored until the announcement of the Egyptian arms deal with the Soviets. Turkey’s courtship of the Jordanians was met with reservations in both Washington and initially in London. The Americans believed,

“there is universal popular Jordanian enthusiasm for the flame of Arab political liberation ignited by Nasser’s arms deal with the Soviet bloc... The Government cannot or will not carry through “unpopular” policies. The weakness growing and mass pressure now so sways Amman authorities they fear mob action if government tries to move against current Arab thinking.”<sup>22</sup>

British Ambassador Sir Charles Duke, who believed that the Jordanians were unlikely to “alter their neutral attitude towards this pact,” shared the Americans sentiment.<sup>23</sup> The Turkish visit was accompanied with the customary Egyptian media abuse, while at the clandestine level, Glubb Pasha and his officers reported increasing ties between Jordanian military officers and Egyptian diplomats in Amman, who were encouraging them to

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<sup>21</sup> Nutting to Eden, 18 June 1955, PRO FO 800.678.

<sup>22</sup> Lester Mallory to the DOS, 22 October 1955, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Duke to FO, 15 October 1955, PRO FO 371/115523 in Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 112.

oppose Jordan's ascension to the pact. The Saudis sought to distance themselves from Egypt's meddling, and instead increased Saudi intelligence cooperation, passing the Jordanians information on Egyptian infiltration in the Arab Legion, while also counseling against joining the Baghdad Pact.<sup>24</sup> The Turks tried to assure the Jordanians that Turkish assistance would help counteract both Egypt influence, and any military threat from Egypt's ally Syria, and also secure their alliance against Israel. King Hussein responded to the Turkish proposal impressed, but outlined Jordan's predicament to the Turks noting, "Jordan is in a peculiar position living in constant fear of an aggressive and powerful enemy. Moreover, we are economically ruined. We have a half a million refugees without work. We want money for development schemes."<sup>25</sup> In response, Bayar and Zorlu said that Turkey was not in a position to provide both military and economic guarantees to Jordan, as they too were in the middle of tough economic times. As a result, Bayar suggested that King Hussein and his government utilize British aid, and that Turkey would also write in support of this measure.<sup>26</sup>

King Hussein, despite his flirtation with Nasser, began gradually to realize that he would have to accede to some sort of British--sponsored aid package tied to membership in the Baghdad Pact. The Eden Government in London had also begun to come around to Jordanian membership in the Pact. The British, buoyed by King Hussein's assurances that he would [potentially] accede to the pact readied the *coup de grace*. Prime Minister Eden and Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan arranged for the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) General Sir Gerald Templer to go to Amman on December 6, 1955, to negotiate the final entry for the Baghdad Pact. The British believed that Templer, who

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<sup>24</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> John Glubb, *A Soldier With The Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), 392.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 392.

was famous for crushing the communist rebellion in British controlled Malaya, would be able to play to King Hussein's military sensibilities as a former Sandhurst student. The discussion between Templer and Hussein was meant to be a heart-to heart, a soldier-to-soldier discussion of the parameters of the Jordanian ascension to the Baghdad Pact. Templer, however, had a notoriously gruff personality and was not known for his diplomatic nature or patience; these traits made him a poor choice to assuage a King who faced numerous challenges to his policy of joining the Baghdad Pact, both publically and also internally from his cabinet. As a result, Templer's strategy was flawed from the beginning, since it focused only on gaining support from King Hussein, "without trying to win over the government, parliament and public opinion."<sup>27</sup> The package that the British had created for the Jordanians and that Templer offered was based on the retention of "full benefits and the guarantee against aggression from any quarter provided by the existing Anglo-Jordan Treaty, in whatever form it might be decided to embody them as a result of Jordan's desire to revise the existing treaty."<sup>28</sup> The British offered the Jordanians to revamp and equip additional units of the Arab Legion, including two infantry battalions, reequipping an armored car regiment with Comet tanks, and most importantly the termination of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1948, in addition to economic aid, to be provided within the framework of the Pact.<sup>29</sup> While King Hussein acquiesced to the British offer, including the renegotiation of the 1948 Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, the Jordanian cabinet was divided between East Bank ministers and Palestinian West Bankers, with the latter believing that any final status agreement to join the

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<sup>27</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Sir Gerald Templer to Harold Macmillan, "Report by General Sir Gerald Templer, Chief of Imperial General Staff On His Visit To Jordan" 22 December 1955, FO 438 W1616 VJ 1051/127G, PRO.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* Templer

Baghdad Pact should be agreed with Nasser's Egypt. Templer in his communication with London said that while the West Bank Ministers "were mesmerized by the Palestine problem, they never went so far as to openly oppose accession to the pact, but they insisted they needed a fortnight to consult leaders of opinion before making up their minds."<sup>30</sup> For many supporters of the pact, the principal problem was the continuous meddling of Egypt in the process and the weakness and inexperience of King Hussein, and his Prime Minister Said al-Mufti. The Jordanian Cabinet, and specifically the Palestinian Ministers, were concerned primarily with the Egyptian reaction. Nasserist agents swarmed all over Amman, utilizing broadcasts from the Voice of the Arabs and increasing public fervor against the pact. In addition, the Egyptians and Saudis, who were still allied with the Egyptians against their traditional enemies, the Jordanian Hashemites, were responsible for numerous bribes and false reports of Jordanian and British collusion with Israel. During the negotiations, King Hussein also reached out to Nasser, in a stupendous act of naiveté, updated him on the progress of the talks, and claimed that Nasser, even with his continuous meddling in Jordanian affairs gave his blessing for Jordan's ascension to the Baghdad Pact. In his autobiography, written in 1962, King Hussein described Nasser's actions saying, "I cannot recall another incident in history where a statesman has made such a volte-face. That was the end of Jordan and the Baghdad Pact."<sup>31</sup> However, there has been speculation of additional double-dealings, specifically on the part of the British, who according to the British Ambassador in Cairo, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, had reportedly informed Nasser that General Templer's

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid Templer

<sup>31</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 93.

mission to Amman was not meant to negotiate Jordan's entry to the Baghdad Pact, but to negotiate an arms shipment.<sup>32</sup>

Templer's negotiations came to a head when the Jordanian Prime Minister, Mufti was unable to convince the Jordanian cabinet to vote to join the Pact. This was precipitated by the resignations of four of the West Bank Palestinian cabinet members "who were generally believed to have been bribed to do so by the Egyptian government."<sup>33</sup> The resignation of the four West Bank Palestinian members of the Cabinet had massive repercussions for Jordan as approval to join the Baghdad Pact was crushed, and ultimately led to the resignation of Prime Minister Said al-Mufti, who was subsequently blamed by both the British and Jordanians for his poor leadership and lack of responsibility. With the resignation of Said al-Mufti as Prime Minister, King Hussein appointed the Interior Minister Hazza al-Majali. Majali, like Mufti, an East Banker, was tasked to form a government, with the sole responsibility to bring Jordan into the Pact. Majali was seen as a strong, pro-Hashemite civil servant, who favored continued collaboration with the British, and a strong line against the rising tide of Nasserism. The Majali government turned into a complete disaster. While Majali promised the British Ambassador to Jordan Sir Charles Duke that he would have a new vote on the Baghdad Pact in the Jordanian cabinet in two weeks after the formation of his new government, mass rioting and public outcry against the Baghdad Pact sabotaged those plans. The riots that Jordan experienced were the worst that the country had encountered, as previously quiet towns such as Hebron and Nablus erupted along with the Palestinian populated refugee camps outside Amman and Irbid. The rioters were spurred on by Egyptian

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<sup>32</sup> Humphrey Trevelyan, *The Middle East in Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard Commons Press, 1970), 57.

<sup>33</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 85.

supplied propaganda that stated that Jordan's joining the Baghdad pact would lead to the end of discussions of the Palestine issue, or that Israel would potentially be allowed to join, all of which were untrue. Majali's aggressive retaliation to the protests, only increased general animosity among the population against the government and its foreign policy. With the large-scale protests from across the political spectrum, Arab Legion forces replaced police on the streets, who could not cope with outpouring of public resentment. The Arab Legion proved itself to be disappointing in its handling of the riots, overreacting and frequently firing on protesters that left as many as fifteen dead, and hundreds more injured. The Legion was poorly trained and ill-equipped to deal with riot control; and public opinion moved even more swiftly against Prime Minister Majali and King Hussein. After just seven days in power, a mutiny among his own cabinet, forced the resignation of Majali and the dissolution of the Jordanian Parliament. The riots within Jordan did not subside completely till January of 1956, when the Arab Legion, imposing martial law, finally put the riots down.

The episode of the Baghdad Pact and public outcry against Jordan joining had a significant impact on King Hussein and his future leadership. At only twenty years old, the Baghdad Pact crisis was the first significant challenge that he faced in his rule. With the subsiding of the rioting at the beginning of 1956, King Hussein met clandestinely with the Iraqi leader Nuri al-Said, without the knowledge of his new Prime Minister, Samir al-Rifai to make contingency plans for a potential Iraqi intervention in Jordan if further events spiraled out of control. Hussein realized that the quelling of public resentment by the Arab Legion had a direct effect on his tenuous position, and led to a comprehensive reassessment of his role within Jordanian politics. Ill-equipped and

inexperienced, King Hussein vastly underestimated the public outcry and the deep-seated resentment that Jordanians, —and especially Palestinians living in Jordan, —felt with his continued push to join the Baghdad Pact. While King Hussein’s primary goal was to attain British aid to enhance Jordan’s military capabilities and gain economic aid to help fight the spread of Communism, the main enemy in Jordanian public opinion was Israel. This was further compounded by what British Ambassador Sir Charles Duke said was a,

“Jordanian attitude towards groupings of states in the Middle East which emerged in 1955 was disappointingly timorous and indecisive. Such was the preoccupation of the Jordan Government with the Palestine problem and Israel and their unwillingness to take a definite line or take any steps to educate and direct Jordan towards what they privately admitted was the best course for the country that *faute de mieux* Jordan got caught up in the dangerous current of Arab neutrality.”<sup>34</sup>

King Hussein’s inability to craft a coherent strategy within the Jordanian government, and his continuous hesitation and the misjudging of the national mood led to a disconnect between the public pressure and the reality that King Hussein and his policy makers believed. Jordanian indecisiveness also played into the hands of the Egyptians and their allies, who succeeded in spreading anti-British and anti-monarchy propaganda, which was not responded to or addressed. In addition, by informing President Nasser of the progress of the negotiations, and by seeking his assurances to accede to the pact, Hussein showed his naïveté and lack of political perspicacity. This was compounded by the instability within the Jordanian government, with continuous turnover of Prime Ministers and the lack of a team in place that was committed to the goals, which Hussein set. Foremost in this was Prime Minister Said al-Mufti, who General Templer accused of being “spineless” as well as “focusing on the Palestine problem at the exclusion of

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<sup>34</sup> Sir Charles Duke, “Jordan Annual Review for 1955,” 27 July 1956 FO 437 W1616 VJ 1011/1, PRO.

everything else.<sup>35</sup> The British strategy, with General Templer at its forefront, was also intrinsically flawed, as it focused only on gaining support from King Hussein, instead of trying to appeal to other members of government and to the public at large, which would have counteracted the propaganda offensive led by Nasser's Egypt. The results of the Baghdad Pact fiasco were a valuable lesson to the young King Hussein, who quickly realized the depth of opposition, which he would have to placate within Jordan to maintain stability, and Hashemite rule. To do this, Hussein needed to seize the initiative from the Arab nationalists to emerge as the fundamental decision maker in Jordan, consolidating power at the expense of the British and his rivals.

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<sup>35</sup> Sir Gerald Templer to Harold Macmillan, "Report by General Sir Gerald Templer, Chief of Imperial General Staff On His Visit To Jordan" 22 December 1955, FO 438 W1616 VJ 1051/127G, PRO.



### Chapter III: The Reassertion of the Monarchy: Jordanian Politics in 1956

The Baghdad Pact and Jordan's failed entry into the British backed military alliance provoked widespread public discontent within Jordan. The public protests that erupted in the final months of 1955 and the beginning of 1956 forced a change in Jordanian politics and "mobilized and radicalized much of the urban population, at a time when there was no shortage of radical parties on the political scene."<sup>1</sup> In response, King Hussein attempted to deal with the rise of radical politics within Jordan, through the Arabization of the Jordanian military and political liberalization. This was hindered by the interconnected nature between regional and local politics, forcing King Hussein to maintain the monarchy's power by enacting a balance between public opinion, which was increasingly active in supporting Arab nationalism, and safeguarding the future of Jordan and the Hashemite monarchy.

The Baghdad Pact fiasco at the end of 1955 had a profound impact on the course of domestic Jordanian politics. With King Hussein grossly underestimating public hostility towards the Baghdad Pact and the subsequent riots across Jordan, the King embarked on a new political program aimed at reasserting the power of the Jordanian monarchy, and restoring calm and order. Jordan's international position had also changed. The British, the Jordanian monarchy's longtime backer, had failed to gain Jordan's participation in their collective security agreement, the Baghdad Pact. The subsequent riots and public outcry amongst the Jordanian people forced a change of Hussein's political strategy away from the longstanding [Jordanian] reliance on Britain as Jordan's imperial benefactor, and instead exercising greater Jordanian control over the affairs of state, and particularly the military. For many Arab nationalists, the Arab

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Robbins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92.

Legion under the command of General Sir John Bagot Glubb was seen as the epitome of continued British control within Jordan, and a lack of Jordanian independence in their own affairs of state. With domestic political challenges and vocal nationalists in both the political sphere and increasingly within the Arab Legion, King Hussein was forced to inject himself at the apex of Jordanian nationalism, preempting his challengers through the firing of John Glubb, and the Arabization of the Arab Legion. King Hussein's dismissal of John Glubb was a calculated gamble based on a difference of strategic views and a fraught personal relationship that also remade King Hussein as champion of Jordanian independence from British influence. The dismissal of John Glubb and the decline of Anglo-Jordanian relations had domestic as well as international implications. Britain's Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden saw Glubb's dismissal as a Nasserist ploy to destroy British influence in the Middle East. In reality, it was the first assertion of Jordanian independence after decades of British control. The aftermath of Glubb's dismissal led to a complete volte-face in Hashemite domestic policy, the liberalization of Jordanian politics, with free and open elections that were eventually won by Suleiman al-Nablusi, leader of the leftist and Arab nationalist, National Socialist Party (NSP). While King Hussein sought to curry favor with Arab Nationalists as a means of keeping a steady hold on [his own] power while also maintaining British backing, international events, the Suez Crisis most prominent among them, would play a big part in determining the course of Jordanian politics. In 1956 King Hussein began to reorient Jordan's interests away from Britain, and toward a tactical alliance with the more progressive Arab Bloc, led by Nasser's Egypt. This tacit realignment was sustained by popular opinion within Jordan, but was not viewed by King Hussein as a final goal of Jordanian strategic

thinking. Instead, the decline of British influence in Jordan and the region after the dismissal of General Glubb and the Suez Crisis, forced the Jordanians to align with the Arab states led by Nasser, who replaced the British as the primary subsidizer of Jordan. King Hussein's end goal was not a show of united Arab force against the West, but instead sought the backing of the United States, a strategic shift which he was unable to complete in 1956.

### *Prelude to Glubb's Dismissal*

The aftermath of Jordan's failed bid to join the Baghdad Pact created a new set of political realities within Jordan. The rise of Arab nationalist and anti-British sentiment was fully displayed for the Jordanian elite, buoyed by Egypt's media assault. It also changed the reality from the Jordanian perspective, that a continued overt reliance on British power within Jordan would have a deleterious impact on the state of political affairs and on the ability of King Hussein to govern. International observers, particularly the United States, were keenly aware of the political changes underway in Jordan at the beginning of 1956. These sentiments regarding a new political approach within Jordanian politics were reported by the US Ambassador to Jordan, Lester Mallory, who notified his superiors at the State Department of his discussions with Jordanian officials. Mallory reported that,

“Prime Minister (Samir al-Rifai) and the Ambassador (Abdel Monem al-Rifai), with both of whom I have talked twice in recent days, are convinced of deep change in temper and opinion of body politic. Prime Minister stated this so significant as to require change in British thinking and approach and he calling (sic) in UK Ambassador Duke in the next day for a frank discussion. Prime Minister claims British appear unable to adjust traditionalist thinking to new circumstances, fail to realize changes and believe through some propaganda efforts waiting and patience all will turn out well.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lester Mallory to the DOS, 26, January 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 37-39.

With the aftermath of the January 1956 public protests, which were put down by the Arab Legion, the British began to believe that the current political reality in Jordan would actually foster closer relations between General Glubb and King Hussein. The British Ambassador to Jordan Sir Charles Duke reported to the Foreign Office that, “one good result of the recent crisis is that it seems to have helped to draw the King and Glubb much closer together.”<sup>3</sup> Duke’s view was unrealistically optimistic and ignored longstanding Jordanian disapproval of the running of the Arab Legion, refusing to see the comprehensive anti-British sentiment within Jordanian politics. During previous negotiations, Jordanian officials had broached the idea with their British counterparts of the eventual Arabization of the Arab Legion, slowly allowing more responsibility to Jordanian commanders. With the Arab Legion as the strongest institution within the Jordanian state, the dichotomy between a force whose membership was led and controlled by British officers whose primary loyalty was not to the Jordanian state, was galvanizing King Hussein to take a stronger line against the British.

King Hussein had long wanted to see a gradual transfer of power to Arab officers at the expense of their British commanders, and increasingly saw John Glubb, the British commander of the Arab Legion as upholding British interests at the expense of greater Jordanian interests. The Jordanians had held negotiations with the British as far back as 1955 over the Arabization of the legion but Glubb continually dragged his feet over structural changes within the Legion. King Hussein contended that he “warned the British frankly, that Jordanians had to be given more opportunities in the Legion. I was

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<sup>3</sup> Duke to Rose, 1 February 1956, FO 371.121560/VJ 1206/4 [Secret] in Robert Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 137.

fobbed off with promises that the matter would be considered.”<sup>4</sup> The British eventually acquiesced at least in principle to the Jordanian demands for reform within the Arab Legion. British reforms within the officer corps of the Legion allowed for the eventual promotion of Jordanian officers in due course, but these measures proved to be halfhearted, as King Hussein was made aware of plans that the Royal Engineers of the Arab Legion would not have an Arab commander till 1985, a proposal that incensed King Hussein.<sup>5</sup> Hussein and Glubb also had substantial disagreements over the use of the Arab Legion and its role defending Jordan during a potential military confrontation with Israel. During their consultations, Glubb favored a more “conservative and cautious strategy of concentrating Jordan’s slim forces on the defense of strategic high points and pulling back at the outset of an attack from the West Bank to the East Bank.”<sup>6</sup> Hussein’s strategy was far more ambitious, favoring a more aggressive forward strategy with Jordanian defenses starting “on the 400 mile frontier (with Israel) and accept death with honor if they could not hold it. To his way of thinking, a purely defensive strategy could not possibly deter an enemy attack, though an offensive strategy might.”<sup>7</sup>

King Hussein’s relationship with General Glubb was also fraught on a personal level, which was exacerbated by their considerable age difference and generational gap. Glubb had come into influence in Jordan under the rule of Hussein’s grandfather King Abdullah, who while a proponent of greater Arab and later Jordanian autonomy was also inherently tied to Britain as his imperial benefactor. The young King Hussein, was less

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<sup>4</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head: The Autobiography of His Majesty King Hussein I of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 139.

<sup>5</sup> Avi Shlaim. *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 100.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 100-101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 101.

inclined to view Britain as the steward of his power in Amman, especially after the failed negotiations on Jordanian membership in the Baghdad Pact. Despite the lack of personal chemistry and differences over strategy, King Hussein's firing of General Glubb was predicated strictly on political concerns and the changing political realities in Jordanian politics. The aftermath of the January 1956 riots solidified the Arab Legion's position as the strongest institution within the Jordanian state—and the only institution that could safeguard the future of the monarchy.

Glubb had become a frequent target for public animosity starting with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, where Jordan's Palestinian populations blamed Glubb for the Jordan's inability to keep the cities of Ramle and Lydda (Lod) under their control. Glubb was also the subject of some of the most vitriolic Egyptian propaganda attacks and [was] "branded by Egyptian propaganda as a collaborator with Israel, Glubb was also suspect within official Jordanian circles for his supposed refusal to adopt an offensive strategy against Israel."<sup>8</sup> These assertions conveniently ignored the sterling performance of the Jordanian military against the Israelis in 1948, relative to the rest of the Arab countries. Glubb's also began a program to bring Palestinian soldiers into the predominantly Bedouin Arab Legion. While Glubb had proved himself to be a capable military commander, almost singlehandedly creating the Arab Legion into a cohesive fighting force, the tensions between him and King Hussein had reached fever pitch, with King Hussein accusing the General of erratic and irresponsible leadership. While internally Glubb and King Hussein's relationship was far from ideal, King Hussein's main focus was the overall preservation of the Hashemite monarchy. The public protests after the Baghdad Pact

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<sup>8</sup> Michael B. Oren, "A Winter of Discontent: Britain's Crisis in Jordan December 1955-March 1956" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, No.2 (May, 1990): 178.

cemented the growing influence of the nationalist movement within Jordan, which could threaten King Hussein's position. As a result, Hussein needed to preempt any action by Jordanian nationalists in both the political and especially the military sphere, and assert himself as the head of the nationalist camp. To establish his credibility as a Jordanian nationalist and protect himself from potential agitation against the monarchy, King Hussein realized that removing General Glubb from the command of the Arab Legion would be the preemptive strike that would placate nationalist opposition and secure the monarchy from a potential coup. By dismissing Glubb from the command of the Arab Legion, King Hussein would be able to assert himself over the most powerful institution in the state, that had been viewed by many "as a foreign occupying power bent on crushing the legitimate national aspirations of the Jordanian people."<sup>9</sup> By doing this, King Hussein put to bed the last remnant of his grandfather, King Abdullah's rule. While King Abdullah, the founding ruler of the Jordanian state was at least in principle a proponent of Arab independence. In reality, he ruled at the behest of the British as their ally and client. His Grandson, King Hussein aimed to change that.

#### *The Jordanian Free Officers*

King Hussein's motive behind the firing of General John Glubb was to "gain complete control of the Legion, to identify it as a "national" army, i.e. an Arab officered army, and thus hamstring opposition charges against it."<sup>10</sup> King Hussein's views about the dismissal of General Glubb were also shared by certain elements within the Jordanian military, most prominently his *Aide de Camp* (ADC) Major Ali Abu Nuwar. Abu Nuwar,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein: Jordan in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138.

<sup>10</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis, *Politics and the Military in Jordan: A Study of the Arab Legion 1921-1957* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1967), 124.

who had been King Hussein's ADC since November of 1955, had been the most vocal supporters of removing Glubb and his British officers from the command of the Legion, and replacing them with Jordanians. Hussein had longstanding ties with Abu Nuwar and his supporters within the military, having known many of them from his time in England at Sandhurst. Hussein first met Abu Nuwar in 1953 during a stopover in Paris, where Abu Nuwar was the Jordanian military attaché, exiled by the suspicious General Glubb, who believed that he was actively subverting British influence. Hussein was impressed with the Jordanian officer, who shared his view on the future Arabization of the Arab Legion. Hussein repeatedly asked Glubb to transfer Abu Nuwar back to Jordan from his position in Paris, but Glubb did not relent, so Hussein overruled him by making Abu Nuwar his *Aide de Camp*. To many observers, Abu Nuwar was seen as the pernicious influence behind the young King. Abu Nuwar was described as being, "almost the parody of the evil counselor: a saturnine, beak-nose Iago, his eyebrows bushy, his mustache sneaky, his grin gleaming but forced, the story of a face you sometimes see, peering through silken draperies, in the shaded backgrounds of Japanese prints."<sup>11</sup>

The involvement of Jordanian officers in politics was not a recent development, but it wasn't until 1952 that a group of officers began to coalesce under the umbrella organization, that came to be known as the Jordanian Free Officers. The history and the actual timeline of the Jordanian Free Officers and the true scope of their influence on the firing of General Glubb has been rarely discussed in the memoirs of those who witnessed the event. The memoirs of both King Hussein at best relegate and at worst completely gloss over the influence and the impact of the Jordanian Free Officers. In his memoir, *A Soldier with the Arabs*, General Glubb mentions the Free Officers in passing, basically

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<sup>11</sup> James Morris, *The Hashemite Kings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 209.



denying the significance and the existence of such as group, tying them instead to Nasser's Egypt. Glubb describes the Jordanian Free Officers' campaign saying,

“the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment had received by post subversive pamphlets signed “Free Officers” and bearing the office stamp of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade headquarters... The recipients were alarmed and had written hastily to inform headquarters that there obviously must be a group of disloyal officers in the other unit, the office stamp of which had been on the pamphlets they received... As soon as the stamps on the envelopes and pamphlets were compared with the original office stamps, it was obvious that the stamps used on the pamphlets were forgeries... The incident is of interest in showing the lengths to which Egyptian propaganda would go in order to undermine the morale of an allied army.”<sup>12</sup>

The reasons for both Hussein and Glubb to belittle and deny the influence of the Jordanian Free Officers have to deal with the political implications. For King Hussein, a comprehensive discussion of the aid he received unseating General Glubb would have detracted from his own centrality to the narrative. From the perspective of General Glubb, the glossing over of the role of the Free Officers would have cast doubt on his capacity as a the commander of the Arab Legion to fully comprehend the political dynamics around him, and would have brought additional questions on his inability to understanding the political machinations under his very nose, making him look like an inept commander. Therefore, the gap in the historical narrative makes the role of Jordanian Free Officers especially important in King Hussein's larger strategy to depose General Glubb, and to set Jordan on a different political path.

The conception of the Arab Legion, and the geographic orientation of its members also played a significant role in the framework of the Jordanian Free Officers. The Arab Legion was divided between regiments and battalions of men who were recruited from the towns and cities, known as *Hadaris* and those who were recruited from the tribal eastern regions, the Bedouin. The Bedouin elements of the Arab Legion were renowned

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<sup>12</sup> John Glubb, *A Soldier With The Arabs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), 413.

for their fighting ability and for their fierce loyalty to the monarchy and to Glubb in particular. In the 1930's Glubb recruited the Bedouin elements into the Arab Legion, and

“did a great deal to educate and train these Bedouin recruits and to help their families, and his bodyguard consisted of Bedouins from the areas bordering on Iraq and Saudi Arabia. They were fiercely loyal to him personally, and there was a real risk that they might try to stage a counter-coup to restore him.”<sup>13</sup>

As a result, the members of the Free Officers were primarily *Hadari*—from the East Bank towns and cities, did not owe their careers and livelihoods to Glubb's influence and patronage. The Jordanian Free Officers were initially influenced by Nasser's Free Officers, and as early as 1952, changed their name from the Secret Organization of Nationalist Officers to the Jordanian Free Officers. Influenced by Gamal Abdel Nasser's recent coup in Egypt, many members sought to establish contact with their Egyptian counterparts, but eventually relented, instead concentrating their efforts internally in Jordan. Shahir Yusef Abu Shahut emerged as the head of the Free Officers and brought in officers from other branches of the Jordanian military, including armor, intelligence and engineering. He tried to recruit higher-level officers within the Arab Legion, as Gamal Abdel Nasser was able to do in Egypt with General Mohammed Neguib. It was this recruiting process that Shahut utilized Abu Nuwar, who was outside the intimate framework of the Free Officers, and who had become King Hussein's ADC, helped initiate contacts between the monarch and sympathetic fellow officers plotting against General Glubb. King Hussein also had contacts with the Free Officers through his cousin and best friend, Zaid bin Shaker. Shaker, whose growing influence with the young King alienated his mother Queen Zain and his other advisors proved to be a useful facilitator,

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<sup>13</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 102-103.

hosting meetings between Hussein and the officers. In the aftermath of the January riots, King Hussein's meetings with the officers intensified.

The final straw for the young monarch was on 28 February 1956, when Hussein was presented with a list from Prime Minister Rifai, of officers that General Glubb wanted removed. That evening, in the home of bin Shaker, Hussein initiated Operation Dunlop, the removal of General Glubb. The plan called for supreme secrecy, especially since the Bedouin elements of the Arab Legion were loyal to General Glubb and because there were prominent British allies within the Royal palace, namely King Hussein's mother Queen Zain, and the chief of the royal court, Bahjat Talhouni. Hussein's allies and the Jordanian Free Officers took precautions to make sure that a counter coup would not happen; as Shlaim records,

“Glubb's house was surrounded with armored cars, his telephone lines were cut, and loyal troops were stationed on the way to the airport. The British officers were confined to their quarters, and their telephone lines were also severed.”<sup>14</sup>

On the morning of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956, King Hussein presented to the Jordanian Prime Minister Samir Rifai a paper ordering the dismissal of General Glubb and a request for his immediate return back to Britain. Shocked, it was Rifai who broke the news to the General Glubb, and within a day, General Glubb left Jordan on a flight back to England, never to return to the place where he had called home for twenty-six years.

#### *The Aftermath of Glubb's Firing*

The sacking of General John Glubb was a masterstroke for King Hussein in the court of Jordanian public opinion, but it did not lead to a consolidation of his power. In addition, the firing of Glubb would have unintended geopolitical consequences, not only

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<sup>14</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 103.

for Jordan, but also for the rest of the region. In discussing his reasons for the firing, King Hussein said to British Ambassador Sir Charles Duke,

“Jordan in its relations with the Ally (Great Britain) has had to suffer from every Arab quarter and even from Britain. Jordan is an independent sovereign country. It was at this time that the news came that the enemy was preparing to launch an attack on us. I repeated my demand for the improving of the army. At this time Glubb was demanding the dismissal of a number of proficient officers. In the face of my belief that the presence of this person (Glubb) in the position which he was occupying was a danger to himself, to the army, and therefore to the nation, I therefore decided to expel him.”<sup>15</sup>

King Hussein’s explanation to the ambassador was relayed to Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden in London where General Glubb’s firing was met with shock and surprise, especially with regards to its abrupt nature. Ambassador Duke was ordered to press King Hussein to reverse his decision and reinstate Glubb, but King Hussein refused to relent famously responding to Ambassador Duke,

“I believe Mr. Duke that what I have done is for the good of my country and I am not going to alter my decision, regardless of any consequences. I would rather lose my life than change my mind. The monarchy belongs to the people, I belong to this country, and I know that I am doing this for the best come what may.”<sup>16</sup>

While King Hussein defied London and stood firm in the face of unrelenting pressure from the British, he aimed to maintain the status quo diplomatically, asserting both in private and public that Jordan was,

“anxious to stand by our treaty commitments. Our relations with the ally, Britain will continue to be maintained on the best of terms. The removal of Glubb from the office of Chief of General Staff is a local matter, which bears no relation to the treaty.<sup>17</sup> We shall keep British officers in the Legion as experts and instructors.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Duke to Selwyn Lloyd, 4 March 1956, FO 438 W 1616 VJ 1201/43, PRO.

<sup>16</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 119-120.

<sup>17</sup> This is a reference to the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, signed in 1948 which provided the Jordanian military with substantial military aid of around 12 million pound sterling, in addition to continued British diplomatic backing.

<sup>18</sup> Duke to Selwyn Lloyd, “Anglo-Jordanian Relations,” 12 March 1956, FO 438 W1616 VJ 1024/1, PRO.

Back in London, British officials relented in applying further pressure against King Hussein, pushed by Sir Alec Kirkbride, the former British resident and Ambassador to Jordan, and by General Glubb, who unexpectedly was a force for tolerance and moderation and was inclined to give the young King a chance.

The decision of the British not to take action against King Hussein after the firing of General Glubb vindicated the young King, and established his credentials as a bold, politically shrewd leader. While the move was risky, and he surely would not have known that Britain would relent on applying further pressure on him, he was able to maintain his power within Jordan with his own growing popularity after Glubb's sacking, while also maintaining Britain's backing. From Britain's perspective, the loss of Glubb was a loss in prestige and influence, but it had a far greater effect, especially in the perception of Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden. Eden's reaction to Glubb's firing squarely placed blame on Cairo, and on Gamal Abdel Nasser. Eden's reaction turned into obsession; the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Nutting commented, "1 March 1956 was the day Eden fatally resolved that the Egyptian dictatorship had to be toppled—that otherwise he would destroy Britain's position in the Middle East and his own position as Prime Minister."<sup>19</sup> This of course could not have been further from the truth. Nasser had no knowledge of the impending removal of General Glubb, and said so to British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd who was meeting with the Egyptian Foreign minister Dr. Mahmud Fawzi in Cairo at the time of the coup in Amman.

In Amman, the dismissal of Glubb galvanized support for King Hussein, but it also emboldened sectors within the military, which grew as another center of power, and

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony Nutting in Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 106.

led to an even more vocal Arab nationalist opposition. King Hussein's initial strategy was to weave between the two camps in the polarized Arab world, Nasser's Egypt, and Nuri al-Said's Iraq. However, Jordan's continued economic dependence on Britain forced the King to weigh his alternatives. On March 12<sup>th</sup> 1956, the Arab bloc of Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia offered to replace Jordan's important British subsidy. King Hussein dismissed the offer, as he had done the previous year, knowing that the Egyptian backed bloc was only seeking to supplant British influence, and could not be trusted. In response, Hussein, with British encouragement, continued to have ties with the Iraqis meeting two weeks after Glubb's firing with Iraqi King Faisal and Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, in a meeting that was supposed to be secret, but was instead leaked to the press and published by the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*. British policy makers maintained that Hussein's entertainment of the Iraqis was necessary as, "King Hussein and the government recognized that the path of popular acclaim had brought them close to the abyss: not only were they in sight of falling completely under Egyptian domination but they had recognized that some gesture was necessary to preserve the practical advantages of the British connection."<sup>20</sup> Hussein's openness to talk with the Iraqis also led to the questioning of his Arab nationalist credentials, and to friction with the Jordanian Prime Minister Samir Rifai. Rifai who was unaware of King Hussein's meeting with the Iraqis and his decision to dismiss General Glubb, disagreed with King Hussein not over Jordan's overall strategy, but over the tactics the King employed in diplomatic policy. Rifai believed the way in which Glubb's ouster and his meeting with the Iraqis were handled was "amateurish and needlessly provoked those countries—Britain and Egypt,

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<sup>20</sup> Duke to Selwyn Lloyd, "The Situation in Jordan Following General Glubb's Dismissal" 26 March, 1956 FO 438 W 1616 VJ 1015/152, PRO.

respectively—on whose goodwill Jordan relied for its survival.”<sup>21</sup> Instead, Rifai advocated a more “measured approach, and the two exchanged in a tug-of-war of sorts over the semantics of Jordan’s foreign policy.”<sup>22</sup> With King Hussein eager to flex his newfound credentials as an Arab nationalist, the relationship with Prime Minister Rifai eventually faltered over King Hussein’s stance on the plight of the Algerians, who were in the midst of fighting a war of liberation against their French colonial overlords. Hussein believed that he could use the Algerian War as a means to enhance his popularity, which had precipitously declined after his meeting with the Iraqis was publicized. Hussein was particularly moved by the stiff resistance that the Algerian FLN rebels had put up against the superior French forces, and was irked that Nasser had “gained kudos as the champion of the Algerian nationalists” without providing the rebels with much material support.”<sup>23</sup> Hussein believed that taking a strong stand on the Algerian issue could potentially resonate with Palestinians within Jordan, and score propaganda points against Egypt. However, Prime Minister Rifai believed that this strategy was inherently flawed, and that it would only embolden Nasser, who had decreased his propaganda offensive against Jordan after the firing of General Glubb. As a result, Hussein removed Rifai from the premiership and replaced him with the old Circassian hand, Said al-Mufti.

There were also new developments within the Jordanian military in the aftermath of Glubb’s dismissal. The newly Arabized Arab Legion was an increasingly important political actor in the months following Glubb’s dismissal. With the elimination of the British officer class, a power vacuum was left within the Legion that needed to be filled.

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<sup>21</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 146.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 146.

<sup>23</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 146.

King Hussein immediately promoted Major-General Radi Innab, a career officer to head the Arab Legion. Innab's tenure was short lived at only a few months, and he was replaced with Ali Abu Nuwar, who was promoted swiftly from Major to Major General by virtue of his friendship with his patron King Hussein. Hussein promoted key royal loyalists within the Arab Legion and changed the name to the Jordanian Arab Army to reflect its new status. Abu Nuwar began the rapid transformation of the Jordanian Army, deftly manipulating regional loyalties as a means to attain more funding for the military, whether it was gaining more money for ammunition and vehicles, or establishing the first Jordanian General Staff College. Abu Nuwar went first to the Iraqis and the British, knowing that they were eager to maintain connections with the Jordanian military. To extract military funds, Abu Nuwar deftly utilized the threat of Soviet encroachment into the Middle East, "dangling the threat of accepting Egyptian—or, worse Soviet—arms as a way to blackmail Britain and Iraq into giving him what he needed to strengthen his own position."<sup>24</sup> Abu Nuwar also used his newfound freedom to reform the organization of the Jordanian Army, while also consolidating his own position as the premier military leader in Jordan. He reshuffled the officer corps by putting *Hadari* officers in command of Bedouin regiments, revamping the hierarchy of these units. According to Abu Shahut, the leader of the Jordanian Free Officers, Abu Nuwar viewed himself as the Jordanian version of Nasser, but the Free Officers never considered him to be one of their own. King Hussein was aware of this, and as a result, did not appoint any of the Jordanian Free Officers to senior command posts, the one exception being Colonel Mahmud Musa, who was asked to head military intelligence.<sup>25</sup> The rapid ascent of Abu Nuwar, and his ability

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<sup>24</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 149.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 149.



to exercise his influence within Jordan and with the British and the Iraqi's impressed foreigners, who believed that Abu Nuwar was a moderate at heart and open to Western interests in Jordan.<sup>26</sup> In reality, Abu Nuwar was most concerned about securing his own position within the Jordanian military, and creating his own center of influence, which would prove to be very influential in the coming year.

### *Political Liberalization and the Suez Crisis*

The summer of 1956 proved to be a time of immense political change in Jordan. Prime Minister Said al-Mufti's government had come to power with the goal of revising the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. The British saw Mufti, who was the Prime Minister during the fateful negotiations with Britain in December of 1955, as a weak political figure,

“whose principal qualification as a successor to Samir Rifai is probably his weakness. The King and the young military officers no doubt estimate that he can be relied on to do what they tell him to do—and on his previous record this anticipation seems fully justified.”<sup>27</sup>

While the Mufti government had a royal mandate to push through a revision of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, the fervently anti-British and anti-imperialist Ba'th and National Socialist Parties outflanked Mufti's government and demanded new elections that would potentially lead to a Arab nationalist government. In response to their request, King Hussein agreed and promptly dissolved parliament, ending Mufti's government after only one month in office. Unlike previous elections within Jordan, King Hussein aimed for the elections to open and fair, with the idea that Jordan would be able to elect a reasonable moderate parliament. However, regional events during the summer, primarily Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, led to a bolstering of radical left-wing parties,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>27</sup> Duke to Selwyn Lloyd, “Formation of a Government by Said al-Mufti,” 28 May 1956, FO 438 W 1616 VJ 1015/195, PRO.

specifically the Baath and the National Socialists. The nationalization of the canal also had strategic reverberations for Jordan's relationship with its neighbor Israel, as well as Britain. With rising Palestinian *Fedayeen* raids from the West Bank into Israel, the Israelis responded with progressively harsher reprisals, the most brutal being, a massive Israel Defense Force (IDF) raid on the town of Qalqilyah in the West Bank commanded by a young Israeli Colonel, Ariel Sharon. The Jordanians sought reassurances from the British with the rising tide of Palestinian raids and Israeli reprisals during the meeting of the Anglo-Jordanian Defense Board. The Jordanians wanted confirmation from London that "the Jordan Arab Army would expect British support to be rendered in the form of air and naval attacks on Israeli ports, military bases, and airfields."<sup>28</sup> The Qalqilya raid reaffirmed Britain's commitment to Jordan's national defense, but also had the effect of attracting more support for the hardline Arab nationalist parties. When the Jordanian people voted on October 21<sup>st</sup>, the results were a clear and decisive victory for the left-wing Arab nationalist parties.

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<sup>28</sup> Duke to Selwyn Lloyd, "Tenth Meeting of the Anglo-Jordanian Joint Defense Board" 8 August 1956, FO 438 W 1616 VJ 1192/91G, PRO.

**Table 1. The election results in 1950 and 1956<sup>29</sup>**

Name of the political party	Number of seats won by the particular parties (the 1950 election)	Number of seats won by the particular parties (the 1956 election)	Views of the particular political parties as concerns home affairs	The attitudes of the parties towards co-operation with Great Britain and the USA
Independent deputies	27	13	monarchists	co-operation accepted
Arab Constitutional Bloc	9	4	monarchists	co-operation accepted
Bloc of Palestinian Arabs	0	2	monarchists	co-operation accepted
National Socialists	1	11	the pan-Arab left	co-operation rejected
Baath Party	0	2	the pan-Arab left	co-operation rejected
National Bloc	1	3	the left	co-operation rejected
Muslim Fraternity	0	4	islamic fundamentalists	co-operation rejected
Liberation Party	1	1	islamic fundamentalists	co-operation rejected

The big winner in the election was the National Socialist Party (NSP), headed by Suleiman al-Nabulsi. Al-Nabulsi was born in Salt, despite his name, to a wealthy landowning family and was educated at the American University of Beirut, where he was active in Arab nationalist circles. After his graduation, he returned to Jordan and joined the civil service and then moved into the finance field. Al-Nabulsi and the NSP's campaign emphasized the socialist nature of the party, and closer relations with Arab nationalists regimes in Cairo and Damascus, distancing Jordan from the British and advocating for Arab unity. The NSP, which was helmed in addition to al-Nabulsi, by the scions of Jordan's wealthiest families, like Hikmat al-Masri, a Nabulus businessman and prominent landowner, and was seen as a party that was patrician in its leadership but

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<sup>29</sup> Bartoz Wroblewski, "Political Cleavages in the Light of the General Election Held in Jordan in 1956" *Politics and Society*, (May 2008): 151.

populous in its capacity to mobilize public support. The NSP was pushed into an alignment with the far left, led by the Ba'ath Party, whose base of support was more middle class in outlook and far more radical than their more moderate NSP competition. With the results of the election, King Hussein allowed al-Nabulsi, as leader of the NSP, the largest party in the Parliament to form the next government, even though he himself was not elected to parliament.<sup>30</sup> Even before his new government could take office, King Hussein began shoring up his credentials as an Arab nationalist, entering into a joint command of armed forces with Egypt and Syria on October 24<sup>th</sup>. The al-Nabulsi government was officially installed on October 26<sup>th</sup>, with al-Nabulsi as the Prime Minister, and the Baathist leader, Abdullah Rimawi as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. While given a relatively modest position, Rimawi was a significant figure because of his vocal anti-royalist positions. The appointment of the al-Nabulsi government coincided with the fateful decision of what became known as the Tripartite Aggression, the invasion to seize the Suez Canal by France, Britain and Israel. The attack took Jordan completely by surprise, as the Jordanians, constantly vigilant about potential Israeli incursions into the West Bank completely missed the buildup. The attack initiated by British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden proved to be a military success, but a diplomatic nightmare. Britain, in a last gasp attempt to maintain its regional hegemony by attacking Egypt, incurred the wrath of the United States and Soviet Union, who forced the tripartite powers to withdraw. The Suez Crisis left Jordan in a unique strategic position, having treaties with both Egypt and Britain before the outbreak of the conflict. With Israel, France, and Britain invading Egypt, King Hussein eagerly anticipated joining

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<sup>30</sup> Jordanian law did not preclude nonmembers of Parliament from sitting in the cabinet, and as the leader of the largest party, Nabulsi was entitled to form the next government.

the conflict on the side of Egypt, but he had to be restrained by Prime Minister al-Nabulsi. Knowing the inherent disadvantage that Jordan's military faced in attacking Israel in retribution, King Hussein stood down, saving Jordan from a potential strategic disaster. But the aftermath of the Suez Crisis had grave repercussions for Jordan's strategic orientation and the fate of the country.

### *The Fallout from Suez*

The fallout of the Suez Crisis cemented the decline of Britain as the main power in the Middle East, and as the strategic backer of Jordan. While Jordanian public opinion "accepted Jordan's noninvolvement, it was infuriated by Britain's collusion with France and Israel and demanded retribution."<sup>31</sup> The Jordanians severed diplomatic relations with the French, but relented on a complete break with Britain because this would have led to a unilateral abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, and an end of the lucrative British subsidy to the Jordanians. While some advocated total dissolution of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, others wanted a renegotiation with the British. The renegotiation camp was led by Samir Rifai, who did not believe that the Jordanians should throw away twelve million pounds without an alternative. Internally, Prime Minister al-Nabulsi also faced internal challenges from his left flank, specifically from the Baathists led by Abdullah Rimawi. While al-Nabulsi was certainly not inclined to accept continued British influence, he was in favor of holding on to the British connection as long as possible. Rimawi on the other hand was far more radical in orientation, and wanted to replace the British subsidy with Arab aid, and to damage Jordan's relations with the West so badly, that they would have no choice but to turn to the Arabs. As Satloff remarks, Rimawi,

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<sup>31</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 156.

“opposed the very existence of an independent Jordan and was committed to substantive Arab unity under the banner of Syria. Everything—tactics, friendship, democracy—was subordinate to those strategic goals.”<sup>32</sup>

Rimawi sought to drum up public support for the dissolution of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty and its replacement. Rimawi’s strategy won out, and on November 27<sup>th</sup> the Jordanian Parliament resolved to negotiate the dissolution of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, and forfeit the lucrative subsidy, by a vote of thirty-nine to one. The strategic shift within the al-Nablusi government was part of a larger shift of Jordan’s alignment, away from the West and toward the Arab world. The al-Nablusi government, was conscious that an orientation with the Arab states under the guidance of Nasser’s Egypt,

“might lead to the surrender of Jordanian sovereignty. But until that happened, they stood for a regime with the king as a decorative convenience, as long as he behaved; cooperation with Egypt and Syria; suspicion of Iraq, and overt sympathy with the Soviet Union, to spite the West as much as for any other reason.”<sup>33</sup>

This viewpoint contradicted the longstanding Hashemite policy, with Jordan in alliance with a Western power that would serve as the guarantor of their stability and security, both militarily and economic. The abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty forced King Hussein to look for alternative sources of funding. He immediately reached out to the United States, who along with the Soviets, filled the vacuum that was left with the decline of British and to a lesser extent, French power. The US Ambassador to Jordan reported these contacts between General Abu Nuwar describing Jordan’s outreach to the Americans noting,

“Nuwar said Communist influence gaining very rapidly here. If the US wants to salvage anything in Jordan it must act immediately. His recommendation is that the US furnish military and economic aid to Jordan in sufficient volume to compensate for similar British aid, which will soon be ended. If US will put up

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Uriel Dann, *King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism: Jordan, 1955-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 42.

money and arms Nuwwar guarantees that communism will be prevented from dominating Jordan, that he will dissolve Parliament and take over the government, and “I and the people of Jordan will follow US policies”. Nuwar said he willing fly Washington and confer with President Eisenhower and other officials and sign agreement along lines as drafted by US. Nuwar said he is anti-Communist but he must have aid and if he does not get it from US he will get it from USSR.”<sup>34</sup>

The American attitude toward the Jordanians was that of indifference, and the United States refused to assure the Jordanians of any sort of financial guarantees, believing that the chances of the survival of a Jordanian state were low. These feelings were reiterated in a Paris meeting between US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his counterpart, British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd. Lloyd’s outlook on the situation was very dim. When asked by Secretary Dulles about Jordan’s future, “Mr. Lloyd replied, ‘I don’t think it’s got one.’ He then added, ‘unless it becomes a little Satellite.’”<sup>35</sup> The British and the American outlook of Jordan’s internal situation crushed King Hussein whose request for American aid was denied. With the Americans unwilling to support what was in their view a lost cause and a waste of money, Hussein was forced to secure Arab aid in place of the British subsidy, agreeing on January 19, 1957, to sign the Arab Solidarity Agreement in Cairo which through joint Saudi, Egyptian, and Syrian cooperation, was supposed to replace the British subsidy with approximately twelve and a half million pounds for the next twelve years. While in public, King Hussein lauded his Arab allies, in reality, Jordan’s strategic outlook had never been worse.

By the end of 1956, King Hussein sat without the backing of a Western power. He had neither international support, nor a stable pro-monarchy government, nor a united

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<sup>34</sup> Lester Mallory to the DOS, 9, November 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 59.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, Ambassador’s Residence, Paris. 10 December 1956 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 73-74.

army. While King Hussein had reasserted Jordan's independence by firing General John Bagot Glubb, Jordan remained at a crossroads. The young King's flirtation with Arab nationalism and the opening of Jordanian politics to elections enabled Arab nationalist parties to come to power, allowing the King to maintain power in the face of previous opposition to his monarchy. During the aftermath of the Suez Crisis radical forces within Jordan pushed the country away from the middle path King Hussein had established, which asserted Jordanian independence, while combining it with tacit British backing of its security and military needs. With Britain's ill-conceived aggression in the Suez Crisis, and the denial of American aid, the Jordanian monarchy and the rule of the Hashemites was left in its most precarious position, having to rely on the aid of its Arab neighbors who had previously sought to undermine it. King Hussein in 1957 faced the gravest challenge to his throne, and in the process, was able to complete the strategic shift that he desired after the Suez Crisis, away from Arab nationalist and British dependency and toward an alliance with the ascendant United States.



## Chapter IV: The Preservation of the Hashemite State

In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis and the dissolution of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, King Hussein's Jordan found itself in a precarious strategic position. The Hashemite monarchy was placed in a tenuous position as, for the first time Jordan sat without the backing of a European great power. King Hussein was able to overcome the internal divisions within the Jordanian state, to reassert his power through changes in American Middle East policy that enabled King Hussein to regain Western backing. It was the implementation of the new anti-communist Eisenhower Doctrine that enabled King Hussein to curry American favor by using the threat of communist influence to clamp down on internal opposition to consolidate his power.

### *Regional Outlook and American Policy*

The aftereffects of the Suez Crisis, in which the tripartite alliance of Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt to seize the Suez Canal fundamentally altered the outlook and alignment of Middle Eastern politics. The British role as the regional hegemon, which dated back to the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, constituted what the historian Elizabeth Monroe coined "Britain's Moment in the Middle East." With the outcome of the Suez debacle Britain's power in the region was diminished, and the United States stepped into the vacuum Britain left. The formulation of American policy in the Middle East had, since the start of the Cold War had been based on the strategy of containing the spread of Soviet influence into the region. Following the Suez Crisis, the United States viewed Nasser's Egypt as a threat and a potential adversary that could fill the growing power vacuum within the region. The Eisenhower administration and its hardline Secretary of State John Foster Dulles worried that the growth of Egyptian power

could “obstruct reorientation of the region to the cause of the Cold War.”<sup>1</sup> Egypt’s foreign policy of non-alignment was based on the alliance of Arab nationalism and Third World anti-colonial neutralism. For Dulles and the Americans, the idea that a country would abstain from taking sides during the Cold War was antithetical to their foreign policy approach. Dulles had famously remarked in a June 1955 speech that “neutrality has increasingly become an obsolete and, except under very exceptional circumstances, it is an immoral and shortsighted conception.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, Nasser’s brand of Arab nationalism and anti-colonial neutralism was increasingly seen by American policymakers as pro-Soviet in its outlook, since Egypt refused to accede to the American policy of eliminating Soviet influence. After the Suez Crisis began, the Eisenhower administration looked for policies that could be explored, “as a means of moderating both extreme nationalist and pro-Soviet views among the Arabs.”<sup>3</sup> The Eisenhower administration believed in enacting policies that would “have the effect of discrediting Nasser, and getting the Arabs to desert him, since they do not approve of his introducing communism into the Middle East.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, the perception from Washington was that Nasserist pan-Arabism and the spread of Soviet-backed communism were fused entities that warranted a resolute response. To do this, the US courted the conservative Arab monarchies as a counterweight to the rising power of Nasser’s appeal, specifically Saudi Arabia. To bring about an anti-Nasserist alliance within the Middle East, the United States first had to engineer a rapprochement between the Saudis and their historical enemies, the

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<sup>1</sup>Ray Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain, and Nasser’s Egypt 1953-57* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 144-145.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy Against Global Terror* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>3</sup> Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine*, 145.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

Hashemites. Saudi Arabia's role as the home of Islam's two cities in Mecca and Medina, and its vast energy reserves made it an important potential partner for the United States as a counterweight to Nasser's Egypt. This rapprochement was sealed with the announcement of the United States' new policy directive, which became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, "a program of assistance to reliable Arab regimes through economic aid, and if necessary, military intervention."<sup>5</sup> The Eisenhower administration convinced Congress that the Suez Crisis gave the Soviets ample opportunity to expand their influence within the Middle East and threaten countries within the region. In his announcement, Eisenhower called for the use of American forces to secure and safeguard "the territorial integrity and the political independence of such nations requesting such aid against covert armed aggression from any nations controlled by International Communism."<sup>6</sup> The Eisenhower Doctrine ushered in American support for the conservative Arab regimes and cast Nasser and his brand of Arab nationalism as being a Soviet collaborator, as a means to rationalize American policy. The Eisenhower Doctrine shored up America's position within the Middle East, and shifted its strategic outlook in the region from previously supporting legitimate nationalist forces within the region to favoring alignment with conservative Arab forces. The change in American alignment from open contacts with anti-colonial national movements, such as the Free Officers in Egypt, was due to the perceived incompatibility between America's ideas of containing Soviet influence and the inherent precepts of anti-colonial Third World neutrality. The Eisenhower Doctrine had the lasting effect of aligning the United States with the

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<sup>5</sup> Takeyh, *The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine*, 152.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

conservative monarchies of the Middle East, a policy that would have a dramatic impact on the survival of the Jordanian monarchy in early 1957.

*Jordan and Saudi Arabia in the Suez Aftermath*

After the Suez Crisis, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was left for the first time without the backing of a major Western power. With British power fading in the Middle East, the Jordanian government abrogated the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty, and began negotiations with the British for the treaty's official termination. Without the British subsidy, the Jordanians lost their economic and military lifeline. At the beginning of 1957, King Hussein signed the Arab Solidarity Agreement with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria to replace the British subsidy, which provided the Kingdom with valuable financial backing. While the Syrians and the Egyptians proved themselves to be wholly unreliable allies, the Hashemites and their historic adversaries, the al-Saud, began a rapprochement under the auspices of American backing that would prove to be a significant turning point in the strategic outlook of Jordan's internal and regional politics. The Americans sought to stop the spread of Arab radicalism and Soviet influence through the initiation of the Eisenhower Doctrine and began to seek ways to break the axis of the Arab Solidarity Agreement. In the latter part of 1956, the Americans approached the Saudis to take a greater role in exercising influence against the rising Nasserist tide. The Saudis had always been the least enthusiastic of Nasser's supporters and had continuously vacillated between their historic connection to the West, and supporting the Arab nationalist forces led by Nasser. The backchannel between the Saudis and the Jordanians was encouraged by the Eisenhower administration, but was consummated by King Hussein's mother. Queen Zain had always been seen as an influential figure in Jordanian palace politics and

was known by British officials in Jordan and policymakers in Whitehall as being pro-Western, seeing the British as the protectors of the Hashemite crown. It was Zain, in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, who went out of her way to repair ties between the Jordanians and the new British Ambassador, Sir Charles Johnston, who had replaced the previous Ambassador Sir Charles Duke in November of 1956. Johnson described the Queen in his memoirs as an extremely charming and personable woman, who made the new Ambassador feel, “all of a sudden that Britain and the West were not entirely friendless in the area.”<sup>7</sup> It was Zain who was responsible for initiating the rapprochement between the Saudis and the Hashemite [Jordanian] s. Zain laid the groundwork for the important meeting between Jordanian and Saudi officials in Riyadh and a private meeting between King Hussein and King Saud in Medina. This meeting took place with Washington’s full knowledge and cooperation, as Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles expressed his support, stating to the US Embassy in Riyadh,

“you should convey to King Saud appreciation for his timely message to King Hussein and belief that exercise of King Saud’s influence should be continued in Amman and that we should both make effective use of resources at our command in suitable ways to assist Jordan.”<sup>8</sup>

The Saudis agreed to help the Jordanians stave off the influence of Egyptians and their Arab nationalist allies within Jordan, effectively driving a wedge within the Egyptian sponsored Arab Solidarity Agreement. With Saudi backing, King Hussein moved forward and consolidated his position with the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Johnston, *The Brink of Jordan* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 27.

<sup>8</sup> John Foster Duller to Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 24 December 1956, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 76-77.

### *The Eisenhower Doctrine and Jordan*

Washington's announcement of its new Middle East policy, the Eisenhower Doctrine, created an opportunity to offer military and economic aid to Middle Eastern states threatened by communism. King Hussein embraced this opportunity to play a strong anti-communist line to gain American support and aid. Cognizant of the political orientation of the Prime Minister Suleiman al-Nabulsi's government, the Eisenhower Doctrine was embraced by the King. However, the deal was denounced in the halls of the Jordanian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and by the al-Nabulsi government. The Jordanian media echoed these sentiments being vehemently opposed to the United States taking Britain's place in the region and in Jordan in particular. In direct opposition to the policy of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the Jerusalem newspaper *Falastin* noted, "The Arabs have never been attacked by Russia, but they have been attacked many times by Western states."<sup>9</sup>

King Hussein capitalized on internal divisions within the Jordanian Government. While some Jordanians wanted to turn Jordan into a republic, others were focused on turning Jordan's strategic orientation towards the Arab nationalist states and the Soviet Union. Al-Nabulsi's political views were difficult to characterize, as he was "all things to all men. He was an opportunist rather than an extremist, a demagogue rather than an ideologue."<sup>10</sup> While his end goal was the eventual destruction of Jordan and a political union with its radical Arab neighbor Syria, al-Nabulsi's interim goal was to push Jordan toward the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. While al-Nabulsi was one of the

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein: Jordan in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 161.

<sup>10</sup> Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 127.

relatively moderate voices, Hussein knew that al-Nabulsi did not have the power to control the even more radical elements within his government, most prominently, the Jordanian Ba'ath Party leader Abdullah Rimawi, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. Following the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine on January 5, 1957, Rimawi vowed that Jordan would remain neutral. As Satloff comments, this

“amounted to a formal government rejection of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Although al-Rimawi later vowed ‘never to change the pound for the ruble,’ 1957 was a time when only fellow travelers championed neutrality.”<sup>11</sup>

Al-Nabulsi provoked a clash with King Hussein, agreeing to the publishing of a communist newspaper and inviting the Soviet news agency TASS to open a bureau in Amman. In response, Hussein targeted al-Nabulsi's sympathy for communism, writing a harshly worded letter to his Prime Minister and then promptly issuing it to the press. Hussein stated in the letter the inherent dangers that communism posed to the Jordanian state and to its future independence saying:

“Strange views have infiltrated into our midst. Unless these unwarranted principles, beliefs and views are curtailed and stopped within certain limits, they will affect all the glory and prestige for which our nation stands. Imperialism, which is about to die in the Arab East, will be replaced by a new kind of imperialism. If we are enslaved by this, we shall never be able to escape or overthrow it. We perceive the danger of Communist infiltration within our Arab home as well as the danger of those who pretend to be Arab nationalists while they have nothing to do with Arabism. Our ranks must be free from corruption and intrigues. We will never allow our country to be the field for a cold war which may turn to a destructive hot war if the Arabs permit others to infiltrate their ranks. We firmly believe in the right of this country to live. Its foundations must be strong and built on the glories of the past and the hopes of the future. No gap must be left to allow the propaganda of communism to ruin our country.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head: The Autobiography of His Majesty King Hussein I of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (London: Heinemann, 1962), 159-160.

This letter [that King Hussein sent to Prime Minister al-Nabulsi and then subsequently published in the press] was strategic in its nature, meant to attract the attention of Washington, showing King Hussein's support for the Eisenhower Doctrine and his strong anti-communist sentiments. Following the release of this letter, Prime Minister al-Nabulsi, Abdullah Rimawi, and the Jordanian Army Chief of Staff General Ali Abu Nuwar met with King Hussein to try and ameliorate the situation and get him to tone down the rhetoric. King Hussein refused to do so. King Hussein's letter established in the eyes of the Americans that he was a potential ally for the United States. While Washington and Amman engaged in negotiations for Jordanian aid, the Americans, up to the beginning of 1957, refused Jordan any aid beyond grants meant to fund the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the population of Palestinian refugees living within its borders. However, after reading King Hussein's letter to [Prime Minister] al-Nabulsi, the US Ambassador to Jordan, Lester Mallory believed that Jordan's problems with "International communism" were sufficient enough to invoke the Eisenhower Doctrine. Mallory had previously been against giving the Jordanians aid, but now noted in his cable to the State Department that

"Hussein has come out with strong anti-Communist stand employing Arab traditions and Islam as a vehicle. By comment favorable to the Eisenhower Doctrine he has publically shown himself on our side. He is now a legitimate target for the regime in Syria and the Communists and the Bathiyin in Jordan. He cannot expect genuine support from the Nabulsi Government... Up to present I have been opposed to any more aid to Jordan on the grounds that they could not make good use of it nor would it gain us any particular credit. The battle is now joined... If he is able to sustain an anti-Communist stand by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and if aid is requested following pro-Eisenhower Doctrine stand, I recommend it be granted."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mallory to DOS, 13 February 1957 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 84-86.



While Washington began to look favorably on King Hussein, seeking ways to assist the Jordanians, the al-Nabulsi government continued to push forward, refusing King Hussein's directive that al-Nabulsi dismiss the Ba'thist leader Abdullah Rimawi from the government, and instead put him on the ministerial committee in charge of negotiating the termination of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. The al-Nabulsi government opened negotiations with the British on February 4<sup>th</sup> 1957 for the final dissolution of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. For both the British and the Jordanians, the treaty had outlived its usefulness. After the Suez Crisis, "in order to rid themselves of a costly and largely obsolete commitment, Britain offered Jordan reasonable terms, and the two sides parted more or less amicably."<sup>14</sup> However, the British, while happy to extricate themselves from their Jordanian obligations, knew that the Jordanian government was wholly reliant on the untrustworthy Arab subsidy. As a result, the al-Nabulsi government pounced on the British pullout, "claiming all the credit for liberating the country from the shackles of imperialism and sought to exploit their successes in order to press further demands upon the king."<sup>15</sup> From al-Nabulsi's perspective, this would lead to his goal of forcing King Hussein to transition to a constitutional monarchy, and eventually to "the establishment of a Federal Union with Syria."<sup>16</sup> Realizing the tide of opposition within the government and the continuing evolution of al-Nabulsi's position from a gradual position of weakening the monarchy, to a full-blown march toward unification with Syria, Hussein resolved to change the government and eliminate the threat to the monarchy and the future of the Jordanian state.

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<sup>14</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 129.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>16</sup> Johnston to FO, February 25, 1957, FO 371.127889/VJ1023/6. PRO.

### *The Zarqa Incident and the Hashemite Crackdown*

The announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine and the rapprochement with the Saudis gave King Hussein breathing space, allowing him to reassert control domestically. With his strong anti-communist position, Hussein made it known to the Americans that the Jordanian monarchy would stand against the expansion of Soviet and Arab nationalist influence. For King Hussein, communism was a godless construct, antithetical to the religious responsibility of the Hashemites, as direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. The King had reached a final conclusion, that the current program of government was incompatible with the survival of the Hashemite dynasty and the survival of Jordan as an independent state. To ensure its survival, King Hussein and his predecessors had always depended on the loyalty and support of the Arab Legion, by 1957 known as the Jordanian Arab Army. However, reports to the King revealed that Hussein's onetime military *Aide de Camp* and Chief of Staff of the Jordanian Army, General Ali Abu Nuwar had been travelling clandestinely to Damascus to meet with Syrian, Egyptian and Soviet agents. Hussein claims in his autobiography that Soviet infiltration was directed at General Abu Nuwar and Abdullah Rimawi, who would frequently drive to Damascus after cabinet meetings and return the next day, flush with cash, keeping some for themselves and using the remainder to distribute bribes.<sup>17</sup> Although Hussein states this in his autobiography, he was not entirely convinced of the duplicity of Abu Nuwar. While there had always been elements within the Army, such as the Jordanian Free Officers, who were politically inclined and sympathetic to Arab nationalism, the palace "had no idea whether disaffection had deteriorated to disloyalty.

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<sup>17</sup> Hussein Ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 156-157.

As one royalist officer put it, ‘becoming aware is one thing; being sure is another.’<sup>18</sup> American sources were also convinced that the army remained loyal to the monarchy with Ambassador Mallory noting, “balance of power at moment [sic] is army which generally assumed loyal to king.”<sup>19</sup> Hussein interpreted much of the movement against the monarchy as a result of a lack of direction within the political and military classes of Jordan. He asserted,

“we had reached a stage when many officers and politicians did not really know where they were going. Some were genuinely nationalistic but felt that Jordan was too small to stand alone. Some decided to offer themselves to other Arab states, which in fact meant offering their services, in most instances, to communism.”<sup>20</sup>

While Hussein’s assertion about the motives of some politicians and officers is certainly true, Prime Minister al-Nabulsi was continually manipulating the situation to his own benefit. The American Ambassador Lester Mallory reported that al-Nabulsi

“continues to build demagogic straw men and then claims he must march with them... To recent visitors he has minimized the importance of extremists and their activity and in the next breath claimed the government must accede to their demands.”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout 1957, the Ba’thist Abdullah Rimawi continuously pushed al-Nabulsi to be intensify his confrontation with the palace. While Rimawi was seen as more of a hardliner, al-Nabulsi began to see himself as “indispensable, and his behavior became increasingly confrontational” especially after the finalization of the dissolution of the Anglo-Jordanian treaty in March of 1957. With the rising confrontation between the government and the palace, the Americans began to believe that opposition to the

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<sup>18</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 163.

<sup>19</sup> Mallory to DOS, 13 February 1957 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 84-86

<sup>20</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 157.

<sup>21</sup> Mallory to the DOS 29 March 1957 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 88-89.

monarchy from the government meant that “probabilities of sort of a *“coup de palais”* in the near future are growing.”<sup>22</sup> On March 29<sup>th</sup>, King Hussein dispatched Bahjat al-Talhouni, his Chief of Diwan<sup>23</sup> to Damascus, Cairo and Riyadh with a message from the King without consulting his government. Ever suspicious that the trip was used by Hussein to warn Jordan’s neighbors of an impending coup, al-Nabulsi vacillated on several options he believed would help change the situation, which included the sacking of Abdullah Rimawi and/or resigning his position, but he decided to stay and with Rimawi’s help, meet the King’s challenge head on. While the letter that Hussein sent to the respective Arab capitals was completely harmless, it was meant to provoke a reaction from al-Nabulsi and Rimawi and ultimately led to a full-on collision between the government and the monarchy.

The hostilities began on April 2, 1957, as the Jordanian government initiated the opening of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Hussein relented from responding to this provocation letting the government overplay its hand. On April 7<sup>th</sup> al-Nabulsi did just that, giving Hussein a list of officials he wanted removed, as a means to weaken the monarchy, most prominently Hussein’s security chief Bahjat Tabbara. Tabarra was a royalist, born in Beirut and a longtime Hashemite ally who had been present at the creation of Jordan following the negotiations between King Abdullah and Winston Churchill. Hussein again acceded to al-Nabulsi’s demands, with al-Nabulsi and his ally Rimawi believing that the King was incapacitated and that they had gained the upper hand. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, the First Armored Car Regiment based in Zarqa surrounded the palace of the Queen Mother, Queen Zain, and other strategic points around the capital,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Term used to describe the royal court.

Amman. This operation, called “Operation Hashim” was in fact billed by the regiment’s commander Natheer Rasheed, a Jordanian Free Officer, as a training exercise meant to rehearse the movement of Jordanian troops from the East Bank to the West in the event of an Israeli invasion. King Hussein was aghast when he heard the news noting:

“I was thunderstruck. I knew things were grave—but an armored regiment! This could only mean one thing—imminent danger to Jordan, a possible attack on the Palace. Certainly Abu Nuwar was plotting a military coup.”<sup>24</sup>

After King Hussein heard of this, he called General Abu Nuwar to Amman and requested that he recall the troops back to their barracks, which Abu Nuwar agreed to do. During his tenure, Abu Nuwar had continued with his Arabization plans within the military and had overseen the changing of the power structure within the military hierarchy. This was especially true within the First Armored Car Regiment, whose troops were primarily loyal, royalist Bedouin, but were commanded by Natheer Rasheed a known Free Officer from a *Hadari* background. As a result, the actions on April 8<sup>th</sup> were a “half baked attempt by the Government’s supporters in the Army to put pressure on the King, possibly already with the intention to abdicate.”<sup>25</sup> On April 10<sup>th</sup>, al-Nabulsi’s cabinet decided to ask for the dismissal of over twenty-five senior officials including Bahjat Talhouni, the Chief of *Diwan*. For King Hussein, this was the final straw and in response, he asked for Prime Minister al-Nabulsi’s resignation, who, confident that Hussein would have no other choice but to reappoint acquiesced to Hussein’s request. Having fired the first democratically elected prime minister of Jordan, King Hussein looked to be in grave danger. As James Morris observed, the King did not leave the palace without

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<sup>24</sup> Hussein ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 162.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Johnston, “Jordan: Annual Review for 1956,” 19 March 1957, FO 371/127876, PRO.

“a picked Bedouin escort, fierce and festooned. Jordan was on the very brink of revolution, and many a political pundit picked up his newspaper that spring, stifled a nostalgic tear, sadly recalled an anecdote about Abdullah, and washed his hands of Jordan.”<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to public reports and King Hussein’s memoirs (where he describes his situation saying, “now I was alone. I had virtually nobody I could trust, but what was I going to do?”), his and Jordan’s position were far better than he let on. King Hussein had the backing of the United States and a new ally in the form of Saudi Arabia. The dismissal of al-Nabulsi, triggered a final showdown between King Hussein and the elements within the government and the army that sought to dislodge him. What happened over the next week in April of 1957 has been subject to differing accounts, but what is undisputed, is that after April of 1957, King Hussein was able to reassert the power of the monarchy, ban political parties, and safeguard the future of the Jordanian state.

Following the events at Zarqa, and the firing of Prime Minister al-Nabulsi, Jordan descended into a state of political flux as King Hussein tried to form a new, more moderate government. What followed was the second phase of the internal struggle between the monarchy and those who sought to dislodge it. In his memoirs, King Hussein describes what followed the firing of Prime Minister al-Nabulsi. However, there are gaps in Hussein’s account as he sought to enhance his own role in the proceedings, while diminishing the role of others. The actions of April 13<sup>th</sup> 1957, were a direct continuation of the events of the 10<sup>th</sup> of April. To replace Prime Minister al-Nabulsi, King Hussein wanted to reappoint Said al-Mufti. In response, General Abu Nuwar summoned Mufi to his barracks and delivered to him an ultimatum, which he was to take

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<sup>26</sup> James Morris, *The Hashemite Kings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 216.

to Hussein, to appoint a more pliable government or the army would take action against the monarchy. According to King Hussein, a group of Bedouin officers from the First Armored Car Regiment came to the palace in Amman accusing their superior officers of being traitors and plotting against the monarchy, among them Natheer Rasheed and the commander of the army himself, General Abu Nuwar. Hussein summoned a car and drove with his uncle and trusted advisor Sharif Nasir to Zarqa barracks where he was met by the soldiers pledging allegiance to him, mobbing him and saying, “we are your men... Thank God you are alive sir! Down with the traitors.”<sup>27</sup> By the end of the evening, the King had confronted General Abu Nuwar, who according to the King was “crying, an abject figure. He was a pitiful sight.”<sup>28</sup> The King allowed the General to leave the country with his life, and went into exile in Syria, replacing him with General Ali al-Hiyari. The coup by the Jordanian military and General Abu Nuwar was averted, but there were aspects that do not stand up to critical scrutiny. While King Hussein and others portrayed the version of events as a cohesive plan between the forces allied within the Nabulsi Government and elements within the Jordanian Army, in reality, the coup was a poorly planned ill-coordinated attempt to overthrow King Hussein, with no real plan of action. This was emphasized by the British Ambassador in Amman, Sir Charles Johnston, who described the story of early April 1957, as,

“An essentially confused one. This was no case of plot and counter-plot by two well-knit teams led respectively by masterminds. On the contrary, it was a confused triangular affair; a game of blind-man’s bluff with three contestants bumping into each other in the dark and none knowing clearly what was happening or what he ought to do next.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hussein Ibn Talal, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, 174.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* 178.

<sup>29</sup> Johnston to Lloyd, 20 May 1957, “The Crisis in Jordan: The Second Phase” FO 437 W 1616 VJ 1015/118, PRO.

After the banishment of Abu Nuwar and other nationalist conspirators on April 14<sup>th</sup>, a brigade of around three thousand Syrian troops began massing on their border with Jordan. In response, King Hussein moved his army northward to combat a potential Syrian invasion with close coordination with his new Saudi allies, who agreed to move troops into the Jordan Valley as a contingency measure. In response, the Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli stood down and withdrew Syrian forces from the border with Jordan.

*Strategic Impact and the Reassertion of the Monarchy*

The events of the Zarqa Affair ended the military conspiracy against the King but it did not end the political challenge to his rule. After Prime Minister Suleiman al-Nabulsi was removed from office, on April 15<sup>th</sup>, King Hussein formed a government led by Dr. Hussein Fakhri al-Khalidi, who replaced Said al-Mufti, after he was unable to form a government. The cabinet was composed primarily of staunch royalists, with the exception of al-Nabulsi, who was installed as Foreign Minister. The reasons for King Hussein keeping al-Nabulsi in government were strategic, as it “underscored his hesitance both to resort to extraconstitutional means to assert his control and to rely too quickly on an army so recently racked by dissention.”<sup>30</sup> However, over the next week, the unsteady balance that had formed in Jordan would again be shaken.

On April 19<sup>th</sup>, the new Chief of Staff of the Jordanian Army, General Ali al-Hiyari, went to Damascus for talks with the Syrians. Al-Hiyari was seen by many observers to be one of King Hussein’s men, but at second glance, al-Hiyari proved to be suspect. His brother, a distant relative of his predecessor Ali Abu Nuwar, was already living in Damascus, after defecting following the incidents in Zarqa the previous week. While in Damascus, al-Hiyari also defected. This was not out of ideological fervor,

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<sup>30</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 169.



however; “Hiyari simply could not stand up to the emotional strain of the post-Zarqa investigations—and perhaps out of fear that he himself had been compromised—he took the easy way out.”<sup>31</sup> In Amman, the government led by Prime Minister Hussein al-Khalidi found itself in a tenuous situation, with the left-wing political opposition making its final bid to retain power. A National Congress was convened in Nablus, on the West Bank on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, where representatives of the left-wing parties in the Jordanian Parliament, including Nabulsi’s National Socialist Party, aired their grievances to King Hussein. Buoyed by popular support from Palestinian quarters which reviled Hussein’s alliance with the Bedouin troops that pushed out allegedly patriotic army officers, the congress called for:

“The dissolution of al-Khalidi’s government and its replacement by a NSP-Ba’th-National Front coalition; rejection of the Eisenhower Doctrine and the establishment of federal union with Syria and Egypt;... and the expulsion of the American Ambassador and military attaché, and the reinstatement of purged officers.”<sup>32</sup>

Unable to respond to such an unrealistic request, the government of Khalidi fell and public protests began, protesting the Eisenhower Doctrine. The National Congress in Nablus convinced King Hussein that, “nothing but brute force applied at once—with minimal time allowed for preparation—could save him and the Hashemite state from disaster.”<sup>33</sup>

With events on the ground moving quickly, Hussein sought assurances from the United States before he initiated his plan to enact martial law and suspend all political parties. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles recounted his conversation with the King,

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<sup>31</sup> Satloff, *From Abdullah to Hussein*, 170.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

<sup>33</sup> Uriel Dann, *King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism: Jordan, 1955-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 60.

giving the King the US's support for the Hashemite crackdown and telling President Eisenhower, "We just had a message ... from Hussein of Jordan. He has a program, which is a good tough program and if it works it will be wonderful for us."<sup>34</sup> The Eisenhower administration reinforced its commitment to Hussein and the Jordanians in a press conference when the White House Press Secretary said that the "the independence and integrity of Jordan is vital."<sup>35</sup> On April 24-25, King Hussein went into action. Bedouin army units shut down Jordan's towns and cities, martial law was declared, and political life outside of the palace was banned. In Amman, seizing on his momentum, King Hussein gathered a conclave of his closest advisors. These men, most of whom served his grandfather, King Abdullah and were responsible, for the genesis of the Hashemite monarchy, along with the British, were reticent to assume the responsibility of office, instead recommended the formation of a military government. It was instead, King Hussein's mother, Queen Zain who "rounded on them and suggested that the ministers-to-be should not be allowed to leave the palace until they had taken the oath of office."<sup>36</sup> With the allegiance of the old-guard civil servants, King Hussein ushered in a conservative pro-American government, led by Ibarahim Hashim and with Samir Rifai as his deputy. In addition, Rifai's brother Abdel Monim was reinstated as Jordan's Ambassador in Washington completing the reassertion of monarchical power and the process of altering Jordan's strategic orientation toward the United States.

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<sup>34</sup>Telephone Call Dulles to Eisenhower, 24 April 1957, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 103.

<sup>35</sup> Editorial Note on Press Conference, 24 April 1957, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, Volume XIII, *Near East: Jordan-Yemen* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing House, 1988), 108-109.

<sup>36</sup> Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 143.

The actions King Hussein took in April of 1957 cemented the burgeoning alliance with the United States. Washington's conflation of the rise of Arab nationalism and its alliance with Soviet communist influence allowed Jordan to become a generous recipient of American aid. On April 29<sup>th</sup> 1957, the Jordanian-American alliance was cemented when the United States agreed to extend to Jordan ten million dollars in economic aid, to maintain the Jordanian economy and ensure internal stability, followed by a grant in June of 1957 of an additional twenty million dollars: ten million in military aid, and another ten million in economic aid. The US aid package far exceeded the previous British annual subsidy and was given to the Jordanians with fewer strings attached.

The consolidation of the monarchy and the pivot towards the alliance with the Americans saved the Hashemite monarchy, but it also had domestic repercussions as well. The anti-communist message that King Hussein promulgated in the early stages of 1957 convinced the Americans, specifically the powerful Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, of his own indispensability in the fight against communism, which the Americans associated with the rise of Nasserist backed Arab nationalism. King Hussein ushered in an illiberal political landscape with free speech curtailed and the elimination of political parties and political freedoms. He purged the Jordanian military, the country's most important institution, of its Arab nationalist officer class and utilized the loyalty of the Bedouin to the monarchy that had served the Hashemites since the 1930's. From the American perspective, the strategic realignment with Jordan and the Middle East, brought to being the framework of American public diplomacy in the region today, most importantly breaking the Nasserist stranglehold on Arab politics and allying historic

enemies, Saudi Arabia and Hashemite Jordan together as a conservative coalition against Nasser and his allies.

## Conclusion:

The evolution of Jordanian politics between 1955-1957 and the survival of Jordan and the Hashemite monarchy can be looked at through the prism of Cold War politics. King Hussein achieved Jordan's political evolution from a British client in 1955, to a tenuous ally of Nasser's Egypt in 1956, to a final consummation of a US-Jordanian alliance in 1957, through the adroit manipulation of internal politics. While Jordan's young King made plenty of missteps, such as misjudging public opinion by pushing Jordan's ascension to the Baghdad Pact, he was able to evolve, and develop a balancing act. King Hussein strengthened his Arab nationalist credentials when it fitted his political program of asserting Jordan's independence from Britain, by dismissing the commander of the Arab Legion, General John Glubb, and Arabizing the Jordanian military, in which he utilized the Jordanian Free Officers. But King Hussein also realized that Jordan needed the patronage of a strong Western power, while at the same time maintaining her independence. Western Cold War strategic thinking, which incorporated the view of the American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, conflated the rise of Arab nationalism with the threat of communism, allowing King Hussein to utilize this policy as a means to gain American aid and to crush internal dissent. The Eisenhower Doctrine was the perfect opening for King Hussein to secure American patronage, replacing the declining British as the major financial benefactor for the state. While the Americans had previously seen Jordan as a lost cause, they came to see King Hussein and Jordan as useful allies in the Middle East for their strong anti-communist stance.

The period from 1955-1957 in Jordanian politics also had repercussions on the future alignment of the Middle East. After the Suez Crisis, the rapprochement between

Saudi Arabia and Jordan ended the longstanding dynastic rivalry between the two rival families, and ushered in the American alliance with conservative Arab monarchies as a counter to Soviet and Arab nationalist influence. Domestically within Jordan, the reassertion of the monarchy and the banning of political parties and political expression was a restoration of the centrality of the crown in the Jordanian polity. Never again would King Hussein or the Jordanian state be challenged by the Jordanian military or by political elites. Instead, the King would continue to utilize the strategy that served him well, co-opting the opposition's strategy to fit his own political needs, as he did frequently between 1955-1957, remaking himself as an Arab nationalist and utilizing the Jordanian Free Officers to suit his political goals of asserting Arab control over the Jordanian military, and then when the time came in April of 1957, when his reign was under threat, doing away with them. It is important to note that the conspirators of 1957 were all forgiven and eventually brought back to Jordan and into the political fold. One example was Natheer Rasheed, the Jordanian Free Officer who was intimately involved in the events of April 1957, and who subsequently returned from exile in Syria in 1968 and was promoted to Major General, later heading Jordan's military intelligence directorate.

While Jordan's Hashemite neighbor Iraq succumbed to an Arab nationalist military coup, Jordan's survival was guaranteed by the actions taken by King Hussein in April of 1957 and through the loyalty of Bedouin soldiers to the Hashemite monarchy. Throughout the political turmoil, it was troops of *Hadari* background who agitated against the state and in the moment of truth; King Hussein was able to call on the Bedouin to safeguard his position. Finally, King Hussein's evolution from a young,

untested monarch to [one who proved to be] a shrewd political operator, allowed the Jordanian state to survive in its current form, moving into an alliance with the United States and gaining valuable political and economic backing.

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