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Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies



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A Hundred Years of Jordan: Emergence, National Narrative and State Evolution

Amman, 29-30 May 2021

Background Paper

The year 1921 was a watershed year in the history of what later became known as “Transjordan”. Prior to this date the regions that came to form the Jordanian state were subject to Ottoman rule (1516-1918), then becoming the scene of the operations of the Arab Northern Army of the Arab Revolt (1917-1918). Later, Jordan became part of the Arab “Faisal” government in Damascus (October 1918 - July 1920). Following the collapse of this Faisal-headed Arab government and France’s taking control over what is now known as “Syria” and “Lebanon,” and with a political vacuum emerging east of the Jordan River, a group of local governments coalesced based on understandings reached between the leaders and representatives of these regions, the clans inhabiting them, and representatives of the British Mandate government (August 1920 - March 1921). In September 1920, representatives and leaders of the Jordanian tribes convened in the town of Umm Qais and in the presence of a representative of Britain and demanded Arab rule in an independent state with a national army. Then, in accordance with the decisions of the San Remo Conference (April 1920), the region fell under British mandatory rule.

On November 21, 1920, Emir Abdullah, son of Sharif Hussein bin Ali, led a small contingent of 30 officers and two hundred soldiers into the Hijazi section of the city of Maan (located in the region of the government of the then Arab Kingdom of Hejaz) acting upon the demands of “those people working for the Arab cause in Syria,” and at his father’s request that he deputize for his brother Faisal. The Emir issued a call “in defense of the homeland,” to liberate Syria from the French, declaring his “only purpose” was “to support Syria’s children” and “expel the French colonial aggressors,” and that he agreed to renew his “allegiance to your King Faisal, I in view of the overwhelming majority of you who have renewed your allegiance to him”. This was even as French forces strengthened their activities on Syria’s southern border and requested the British government take steps to contain the Emir’s activity, seeing in his movement a violation of the “Sykes-Picot” agreement of France and Britain.

Emir Abdullah entered Amman on February 29, 1921, and on March 28, 1921, met with some leaders of the Arab revolt for independence and Arab government agencies at the time, who were seeking refuge in Transjordan, the only region of Arab government rule not falling under French control after the Maysalun battle near Damascus; this established a principled alliance between them and the Emir.

Emir Abdullah visited Jerusalem to ask the British Minister of State for Colonial Affairs Winston Churchill to establish a local administration for an embryonic government in Transjordan. Their meeting lasted for three days (March 28-30, 1921) before Abdullah returned to Amman to establish - on April 11, 1921 - the first Jordanian government, under the name of the “Council of Consultants,” headed by the last governor of the Arab *wilāya* of Aleppo during the stage of the Arab government in Damascus, Rashid Tlee’a, and he was appointed as an administrative clerk for those accompanying him in the council, members of the Arab Independence Party - a front for the Al-‘Arabiya Al-Fatah Association during the Arab government stage - with modern administrative experience in organizing governance affairs. That date was considered, in official Jordanian narratives, the date of the establishment of the first *Arab* government in the Emirate of Transjordan. There was only one “Jordanian” in it, Ali Khaleqi al-Sharairi, appointed as security and discipline advisor, who was formerly an officer of the Great Arab Revolution among the military leaders of the Arab government in Damascus.

The Arab Mashreq: Melting the Idea of the Arab State in New States

Establishing a state in Jordan entailed a set of important historical transformations linked the Levant and East Jordan in particular. In and of itself it means abandoning Arab aspirations of establishing an independent state within one single geographical region, “Bilad al-Sham,” to sanctify the San Remo Conference’s division of the Levant region into four new entities: Transjordan, Palestine, Syria, and Greater Lebanon. For Jordan, this meant of disconnection from its naturally firm geographical - environmental linkage with the framework known as “Bilad al-Sham,” (the Levant), and the gradual breakdown of centuries of economic and social relations and communion with different areas or regions based upon geospatial connection, or simply the feeling that the entire region is united, and that there are no dividing borders within it.

Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that the “San Remo” agreements gave rise to artificial entities in the Levant, notwithstanding subsequent developments that helped establish national identities and patriotic feeling and the rise of their own symbols distinguished from others, within the scope and borders of each of these countries: Jordan in this context is no exception, and no different from Syria or Lebanon, in the process of its establishment.

The British established a mandatory authority in Transjordan, headed by a counselor, (“*al-mu‘tamad*,”) administrators, and military leaders controlling the administration, shepherding the emerging emirate, and helping Emir Abdullah to establish his domain and combat his rivals – but at the same time exerting great pressure to rid the core of the local administration of its Arab patriots and independence fighters from the Arab movement’s three main currents: “*al-Fatāh*” (the Arab Independence Party), “*al-ittihād*” (the Syrian Federation), and the former Supreme National Committee in Damascus. Emir Abdullah’s task was not easy, but he responded to the demands of the British advisors to save his throne. He confronted a nationalist movement outraged with the West and everyone dealing with it, buffeted by the winds of national revolution blew from Iraq, Jabal al-Arab, Jabal Amel, and the Alawite Mountains. Jordan had also witnessed a rise of entity nationalism, resistance to the mandate, rejection of the 1917 “Balfour Declaration,” the demand for national independence. The first steps towards this were taken with Britain’s recognition of the Emirate of Transjordan as a state, on May 15, 1923, ratified with Emir Abdullah in the Jordanian-British Treaty of 1928. The rise of a nationalist movement that resulted in the convening of the first national conference the same year.

The Process of Forming the State of Jordan

The establishment of the state imposed a two-pronged process of dismantling historical relations and establishing alternative ones, linking different regions with each other and producing a region with new political borders and framing these regions within a new state. This process resulted in changing

the vital administrative centers of the existing communities and fostering new such administrative centers, the most important of which was Amman, which became the capital of Jordan.

This process was unprecedented in these societies. The establishment of a state in the Transjordan region was not a response to economic and social development witnessed by the region; nor was it due to an accumulation in a surplus requiring development of a state apparatus to perform functions necessary in managing the existing society; nor was it as a result of the development of local elites whose influence had extended to the entire region to become a ruling elite and so building natural bonds and interdependencies; nor was the region that constitutes the modern state of Jordan in a state of hostility with other surrounding regions and so compelling it to develop a protective military apparatus, contributing to the state's foundation: contrary to all of that, these societies did not witness any transformations, and the inhabitants of these areas did not feel changes justifying any shift in their lifestyles or change in their economic and social conditions. They even considered themselves to be extensions of other regions in the Levant. Perhaps the convening of the "Umm Qais Conference" in 1920 gave expression to this in their demands for the establishment of an Arab state.

Hence, the establishment of the state was not a response to patriotic feeling, national symbolism, and patriotic consciousness developed over time and paving the way for the establishment of a state giving it expression. Rather, the matter was on the contrary, for the Trans-Jordan region is one of the poorest and least developed regions of the Levant, in terms of economic and natural resources. The periods prior to the establishment of the state showed no sign of the rise of local leaders capable of developing their influence and establishing control over the rest of the region, so as to become a regional elite; these leaderships remained local elites par excellence, and their local influence waxed or waned as a result of their subjective parochial conditions, and their internal interaction with those local conditions. It was natural for Transjordan to go through a phase of political vacuum following the fall of the Arab government in Damascus and the British attempts to build an administrative alternative – resulting in the establishment of seven local governments that were a clear reflection of the reality of a multiplicity of leaderships and the weakness of their influence beyond the limits of the local.

The totality of relations existing in the regions of Transjordan with its neighborhood could be characterized as horizontal relations extending from all areas of what is today's Jordan – Jordan south to Jordan north – to horizontally equivalent regions and districts in mandatory Palestine as well as relations extending from today's southern Jordan and the Hejaz to northern Jordan and southern Syria. The northernmost part of Jordan represented, along with the far south of Syria, one region with Damascus as its great metropolis: Horan, with its two parts in Jordan and Syria, and northern Jordan (including the Ajloun Mountains and Jerash) more generally. Likewise, Hebron and Nablus were metropolises for the southern, central, and northern regions of Jordan, while the Palestinian coast - including Gaza - formed the coast of the communities residing in areas of Transjordan. The desert of Levant and the north of the Arabian Peninsula formed a nomadic migratory domain for the Bedouin clans in Transjordan. On the other hand, the societies of what will constitute "Palestine" and southern Syria considered the regions of Transjordan to be a natural extension of themselves,

economically and socially, and they maintained an interactive relationship with them, just as the tribes of the Negev desert, or Syrian “*badiyah al-sham*” desert in the north, both considered the eastern Jordan desert to be their own its natural extension.

Consequently, this carving of the Trans-Jordan regions from their natural surroundings, confining them within the boundaries of a new region, led to new relations replacing previously existing ones. This replacement process was neither easy nor smooth, and it lasted for quite a long period of time; even at the level of collective consciousness, changing these interrelationships between local communities in Transjordan with other regions in the Levant was not easy. The inhabitants of each of the regions that came to inhabit one region called “Transjordan” had become accustomed to economic, social and even administrative relations with other provinces that after 1920 became part of new entities (Palestine under the British Mandate, Syria under the French Mandate), divided by borders and controlled by different political administrations.

The processes of installing the relationships developed between the regions of this new region were not smooth and direct, given that these areas were not necessarily contiguous with each other, or even sufficiently deeply aware of their social and economic structures and the course of affairs in each part of the region in terms of internal developments and local leaderships. The best thing that can be said in describing the interconnectedness between the regions of Transjordan is that it is weak, and not measured by firm linkages and mutual dependencies with adjacent regions established over past decades, but that since 1920 those developed with and within new and newly-created entities.

Contexts of Building the Jordanian Identity and the Evolution of Its Elements

Given the above, theories that are used for the construction of modern states do not apply to the establishment of the state in Jordan. The ruling elite the newly created state is an Arab elite that is neither local nor affiliated with one of the local regions. As for the surplus manpower needed to build the military and civil bureaucracy, it was provided by the mandate state.

In all cases, Jordanians had - for the first time – to conceive a new identity in addition to their local regional identity that they know and identify themselves with, to distinguish them from their surroundings and from other regions, whether these areas link to part of Transjordan, or to part of Palestine as defined by the Mandate, or to Syria, or to the Kingdom of Hejaz, the Sultanate of Najd, or to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: the Jordanian identity framing the new frontiers of a newly established state.

This identity was not familiar to the inhabitants of the regions and was not well definable without affiliation or identification documents. Perhaps it is these factors (the dismantling of interdependent relations with other regions outside the territory of the modern state and the building of new relationships between regions that were not originally in contact with each other in the modern

state), that contributed to the imagined division of the structures of the Jordanian society that exists until today, between the country's major regions (North, South and Central). For some, this division is still an arena for analysis of the cultural and social differences between regions and subsequently material for explaining political competition that repeats the same analysis on regional and parochial grounds, or the inevitably accompanying discussion of quotas as they relate to political elites, state resources, or jobs, and economic elites.

Like all other countries that arose in the Arab Mashreq and in the wider Arab region, the Jordanian state has been, for several decades, in a constant endeavor to build a perception of itself and its being as an entity. This matter in Jordan was more complicated than in other countries, as there were many complementary and contradictory visions governing the public perception of the modern Jordanian state and its future. In any case, Jordan was never far from developments in the Arab Levant. The outbreak of the Great Syrian Revolt, for example, was an event of an internal consequence to Transjordan. Likewise, the Palestinian cause and its developments, revolutions, and wars have been always found their reflection in Jordan, as a state and as a society, such that Jordan's handling of developments in Palestine hardly differs from the conduct of some areas of Palestine with other Palestinian areas, as it is conduct based upon historically established and continuing interdependent relations established during the Mandate. The details of events in Palestine, or in some of its regions, have a direct impact upon Jordan in general, or on some of its regions. Naturally, this matter became all but officially institutionalized in the aftermath of the 1948 war, with the birth of "the state of two riverbanks" in 1950, until Jordan's *Disengagement* from the West Bank in 1988. Regional developments led to an important political event in Jordan's history, known as the "1989 Upsurge" (*hibbah*) leading to a political reform project. Equally, the region's crises and major developments have direct repercussions on Jordanian state and society, notably the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its aftermath (1990-1991); the US invasion of Iraq (2003); and the Arab Spring and its ramifications(2011).

In general, the state of Jordan did not have the luxury of turning away from to the Levant region, Iraq or the Arabian Peninsula: declaration of the establishment of the state did not end its interrelation with the region – not withstanding the vision that gradually developed in Jordanian political discourse of this country's unique Jordanian interests.

The Transitional State: Disparate Visions and Wills and their Impact on Building the Jordanian state

Britain's vision of establishing the state of Jordan remained an important factor in the conception and development of the state within its overall regional strategy: as *a land bridge* between its areas of influence - from the Suez Canal to the Gulf of Basra and onwards to India, and maintained at a minimum financial cost.

Emir Abdullah for his part adopted a vision of this existing and emerging state as transitional and aspiring to become part of a wider Arab state, whether this be with Greater Syria, Iraq, the Fertile Crescent project, or including Jordan and Palestine. This vision was one reflecting not simply the Emir's undeniably important personal ambition, but also the frailty of the country's economic and natural resources and diversity of the ruling political and bureaucratic apparatus operating throughout different regions of the Levant. To a large extent, diverse economic, political, and educated elites in the emerging country conceived, consolidated and sanctified the perception of the state as a *transitional* state. These two ever-contradictory visions explain - in part - the nature of the relationship between the governing authority and political elites on the one hand, and mandate administration, on the other.

The first four decades of the history of the Jordanian state have been marked by the constant desire for a larger geographical area or integration into a major, larger state, thus consolidating within the power structures and active political and economic elites the idea of transitional or interim state. This has perpetuated the notion of Jordan as an expandable, extensive country in which the Arab nationalist current is deeply rooted at popular and political levels. This impetus to an organic link with the Arab movement and its principles, and had quite an effect on the dilemma of building the nation-state or constructing the broader nation (*al-umma*), or in defining the components or symbols of the Jordanian identity, and perhaps it may have constituted a real obstacle to the birth of a broad national Jordanian feeling. The state-building process includes two contradictory dimensions: the establishment of the state and its military and bureaucratic apparatus, with all these imply in defining the state's interests; and, at a later stage, to dissolve itself within a grand country, or to expand the state across a wider geographical area including multiple and more varied economic and social components and new elites.

The history of Jordan, up to the year 1948, which is the date of the attempt to expand the geographical area of Jordan by establishing the "state of the two banks of the river Jordan," was an expression of this permanent contradiction between two processes. Political struggles between elites or parties, or between the authority and the opposition, reflected this binary. For example, the national conferences that Jordan has witnessed since the end of the twenties, have upheld the rights of Jordanians and their share in state functions, and have emphasized Arab unity, Arab issues, and the Zionist threat, and the parties that have been established have always been parties with an extended dimension, and the economic elites of the 1930's and 1940's were extended elites as well. The narratives of the history of Jordan have been influenced by all these factors.

As the Jordanian state proceeds to complete its first centenary, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, in cooperation with the University of Jordan and the Royal Jordanian Hashemite Documentation Center, announces the allocation of the eighth session of the Historical Studies Conference to study this topic, under the title "*The Jordanian State: a Century from its Establishment*," in an attempt to contribute to a critical reassessment of how Jordan emerged, established itself,

and survived, and in order to understand the historical process in which it developed in a turbulent region, and neighbors with greater influence over politics, geography, resources, and population.

The history of Jordan, up to the year 1948, which is the date of the attempt to expand the geographical area of Jordan, which was achieved only in the process of establishing the state of the two banks, was an expression of this permanent contradiction between two processes: Political struggles between elites or parties, or between the authority and the opposition, included this duality. For example, the national conferences that Jordan has witnessed since the end of the twenties, which called for the rights of Jordanians and their share in state functions, included an emphasis on Arab unity, Arab issues, and the Zionist threat, and the parties that have been established have always been parties with an extended dimension, then the economic elites That crystallized in the 1930's and 1940's were extended elites as well. The narratives of writing the history of Jordan were influenced by all these factors.

As the Jordanian state proceeds to completion of its first centenary, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, in cooperation with the University of Jordan and the Royal Jordanian Hashemite Documentation Center, announces the allocation of the eighth session of the Historical Studies Conference to study this topic, under the title "A Hundred Years of Jordan: Emergence, National Narrative and State Evolution". In convening this conference the Arab Center endeavors to re-examine Jordan's founding years in the overall modern-day, historical context of the surgings of the Arab Levant, and to critically review and understand the processes of Jordan's emergence and development – and its continuing existence within a troubled region amid neighbors of greater weight in terms of politics, geography, resources, and population.

This conference, which will be held in Amman on May 29 and 30, 2021, comes in line with the Arab Center's endeavor to review the founding years of the modern Arab Levant, with its general historical movement, and subject it to study research and reflection: to evaluate and critique it, with scientific and academic rigour, especially since its annual historical studies conference through its seven sessions has devoted themselves to important topics related to this historical stage. In the second session (2015), the conference discussed the First World War in its 100th anniversary from an Arab point of view. And in the fourth session (2017), it discussed the "Sykes-Picot" agreement on its 100th anniversary. The fifth session (2018) was devoted to researching Arab historical studies on the topic of the Nakba on its seventieth anniversary. The sixth session (2019) dealt with a research and evaluation discussion related to the Arab government in Damascus (1918-1920). The seventh session (2020) came to examine the twentieth revolution in Iraq in its centenary.

Thus the eighth session of the conference devotes its eighth session to discussing destinies of the contemporary formation of Jordan at its centenary, with the perspective that the establishment of Transjordan in 1921 was a result of major geopolitical transformations then underway in the Levant and Iraq.

This conference attempts to return to Jordan's destinies across a hundred years of recent history, and to answer a number of questions, including: How did this country progress? How were its institutions

built? What are the reasons for its survival and continuation? How did its region, once pertaining to the Ottomans, and then subsequently to the Arab state of King al-Faisal, come to be united within a national framework with an inclusive and binding identity? What are the drivers of production and stability in it? What are the roles of its parties and elites?

Jordan – it seems clear - represents a very important case study, for reasons such as the following:

- In a turbulent environment full of ideologies and intellectual streams, unbridled political conflicts and ambitions, the Jordanian state was able to maintain rare stability and sustainability, and then to become the first (and the only, so far) Arab state to reach the hundred years milestone, in a continuous political regime that has remained relatively stable, without radical transformation or disconnection along the lines of the revolutions, military coups, foreign occupation, and civil wars witnessed in its neighborhood. Examining this may provide lessons of great importance for the Arab social sciences, especially regarding the issue of the state, its development, and the factors of its permanence.
- Although the idea of “the artificial state” has been current during the past three decades in descriptions of the Arab state in the Mashreq, the case of the state of Jordan is a very important example. Although nations such as Egypt, Iraq, and Syria were quick to construct a national memory, the situation in Jordan is very different, located as it is in a part of the historic Levant, under the Arab government in Damascus (1918-1920), and at some point – beginning in 1921— becoming a nation-state. Although this state is still struggling through a long and complex process of nation-building. If it has not yet become a state based on the notion of citizenship, it nonetheless provides an example of how national identity, nation building, and its historical memory can be created.
- Whereas the Arab state arose in the Greater Mashreq in contexts of favorable natural conditions with natural and water resources and major urban commercial centers, the Jordanian state had to be established, grow, and pave its way whilst lacking all such “endowments”. The great paradox then is that while the Arab Mashreq state would fail, the Jordanian state would write itself sustainability.

In general, this conference focuses on two main problems: **the first** relates to the factors that maintained the permanence of the state and its political system in a turbulent environment. This is the main question that energized the invitation to and adoption of this topic. These factors include everything related to the structural reservoirs - including external ones - that have contributed to forging this state sustainability and permanence. These place this conference in an interdisciplinary position, starting with history, opening to the wider universe of social sciences as it examines state formation and institution-building, the relationship of the state to society, foreign policy, etc. This also means that this conference does not study everything related to the history of Jordan in the past hundred years, but only what is related to aspects related to the conference topic itself. As for the **second** problem, it is related to the historical narratives of Jordan that accompanied the building of the state and nation: How did they grow? What did they focus on? What are the elements of difference and concord in them?

Conference themes

The scientific committee of the conference invites researchers and researchers concerned with the issues and problems of this conference to contribute to it with written scientific papers, in which the academic research, formal and substantive specifications are available, approved by the center, and which focus on providing new treatments or additions, within the following suggested themes and issues:

- Narratives of the Establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan: Critical Approaches.
- The Local Government Stage: The stage of administering the regions of Transjordan (April - September 1921) prior to the establishment of the emirate.
- Governance development and the establishment phase: Transjordan in the context of the major geopolitical transformations in the Arab East after the First World War.

Contexts that shape the Jordanian national identity and Jordanian citizenship.

- Building the historical narrative of contemporary Jordan.
- Modern formal and informal historical narratives about the state and its establishment, and about contemporary Jordan's development.

The roles of the national movement and the elites.

- Transjordan press during the foundation phase.
- Jordanian communities, clans, and the Transjordan government during the first decade of the emirate's founding.

The birth of the modern Jordanian national movement.

- Diversity of origins, ethnicities, and social diversity and its role in establishing and developing the state.
- The external relations of the Emirate of Transjordan with the emerging governments in the neighborhood (Iraq, Syria, Najd, Hijaz and Egypt).
- Contest of the founding Arab nationalist and Jordanian national currents: The debate of ethnic origins and citizenship.
- The competition in the narrative of Jordan's history between traditional political history and social and economic history.

Participation Guidelines

The conference committee receives research proposals (in about 700 words), accompanied by an updated CV of the researcher, in Arabic or English, no later than November 15, 2020, provided that the basic formal and standard specifications of the research proposal are met: the research problem and its issues Its basic assumptions, methodology and theoretical frameworks that it uses, as well as what may be considered new and research additions at the level of treatments, approaches or results, with a list of references and sources that have been adopted.

- The research proposal is subject to internal arbitration, and the researcher is informed of the outcome, whether it is accepted, rejected or requested to amend, within two weeks of submitting the proposal.
- Research proposals approved by the conference committee (6000-9000 words), taking into account the specifications of the formal and substantive research paper approved by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in writing research papers, in a manner that is arbitrable and original, and not previously published, either in whole or in part, by 15 March 2021.
- A specialized scientific committee judges the research, and the committee is obligated to inform the researcher or researcher of its decision whether to accept, reject, or request an amendment, within a period not exceeding April 30, 2021.
- The approval of the conference committee on the research proposal is not considered automatic approval of the participation of the research in the conference. All correspondence should be directed to the email address of the conference:

history.conference2021@dohainstitute.org