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WEBINAR

THE ENDURING US-JORDANIAN ALLIANCE

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Opening Remarks:

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Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good morning and good afternoon and good evening to those of you outside the Washington area. I am Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. And I'm delighted to welcome you on behalf of our Center for Middle East Policy to today's event on the Enduring US-Jordanian Alliance. We are excited to gather virtually to launch an important new book by Bruce Riedel, who is a senior fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy here at Brookings and a veteran analyst of the region having served for 30 years at the Central Intelligence Agency and as a senior advisor on South Asia and the Middle East to four U.S. presidents on the staff of the National Security Council at the White House.

"Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship," is the first book to tell the story of the two countries' more than 70-year bilateral relationship. In this remarkable book, Bruce traces the story of how American presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Joe Biden have worked closely with Jordan. First with King Hussein who came to power in 1952 and then with his son King Abdullah who inherited the throne in 1999. Bruce brings his enormous experience and expertise to bear as he lays out the history of the relationship and provides fascinating insights and new details, especially in his telling of the two wars fought between the U.S. and Iraq and of the Arab Israeli conflict in diplomacy.

Joining Bruce on-screen and moderating today's conversation is Mike O'Hanlon, who's director of research in the foreign policy program and senior fellow and director of our Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology here at Brookings. We'll be taking questions from viewers, which can be submitted via email to events@brookings.edu or via Twitter at #JordanandAmerica. With that, I'll hand the floor over to Mike and look forward to this terrific conversation.

MR. O'HANLON: Suzanne, thank you. And greetings, everyone. And it's a real privilege to be joining my colleague, Bruce Riedel, as well as you, Suzanne, for this great discussion of an amazing book. I'm just going gush for one minute in compliments before I get into the actual questions. I have read all of Bruce's books. I've had the pleasure and privilege of being his colleague, as has Suzanne, for about 15 years. And he's just one of my favorite writers at Brookings. He gets to the point better than anybody I've ever read, both listening to him and reading him. He's written previously on

Pakistan, on Al-Qaeda, on the Saudi relationship with the United States, on other topics as well. And some of them historical going back to United States involvement in the Middle East in the 1950s.

And this book, in my opinion, is simply his best among a lot of hits. And the reason I say that is partly because the analysis is so good, but partly because the story is so fascinating. And Jordan is so much at the lynchpin of Middle East politics, of so many events. It's either at the eye of the hurricane, if you will, or part of the mix depending on the crisis. And also, it's been a longstanding friend of the United States as Bruce explains.

So, Bruce, congratulations on just an amazing piece of work. As I've said before, I hope Netflix makes a mini-series out of it because the drama is so capturing and captivating. And I wanted to just congratulate you, but also ask you to begin by telling us what is so special about the U.S.-Jordan relationship that made you want to write this book and why, in your opinion, has it on balance been a success?

MR. RIEDEL: Thank you, Mike. And thank you, Suzanne, for that very kind introduction. And thank you, Mike, for your gushing. I deeply appreciate it. The U.S.-Jordan relationship has been a success story. In many ways, it's a bit of an unlikely success story because Jordan sits in the epicenter in the Middle East in the eye of the hurricane as you put it, Mike. Surrounded by Syria and Lebanon to the north, Iraq and behind that Iran to the east, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen in the Gulf to the south, Israel and the West Bank to the west, just across the Gulf of Aqaba in Egypt.

All of these countries are bigger with the exception of Lebanon. They are stronger than Jordan. And two of them enjoy extraordinary relationships with the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. But yet, in this environment of being, let's say, second tier, Jordan has consistently hit above its weight and been more of a player in American thinking and American decision making than many would imagine. And it has been able to keep pace with its more powerful neighbors like Israel and Saudi Arabia.

I think a large measure of the reason for that is two extraordinary individuals, King Hussein, in particular. King Hussein ascended to the throne at the age of 17. Nobody, including his mother, thought he was going to a success. President Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster

Dulles, was about to make a visit to the Middle East when he asked the embassy in Amman to set up a meeting with the king and the embassy famously responded, why? Nobody thinks he's important. If you want to talk to somebody important, talk to his mother.

But instead, he survived numerous assassination attempts. He survived the disastrous decision he made in 1967 to put his army under the command of the Egyptians and joined the war against Israel that lost the West Bank in East Jerusalem (inaudible) for being staged the occupation that continues to this day. He famously tilted towards Saddam Hussain in 1990 and he paid a price for that. But nonetheless, by the time he passed away in 1999, he was universally recognized as one of the great statesmen of his time.

And his son, who also survived assassination attempts, has proven to be an adept learner. He has not made the mistakes that his father made. Although today, we may be seeing a new mistake with his real estate procurement. And I'm sure we'll talk about that in a while.

But Jordan is a success story, a country that has no natural resources aside from some archeological ruins. It is inundated with refugees from Syria, from Iraq, from Palestine. It has nonetheless, if not prospered, has been a success story. That story from both Jordan and the Jordanian relationship with the United States is what I thought was important to write about in doing this book.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic, Bruce. And we will come back, I'm sure, to the real estate story the *Washington Post* is trying to make a big deal out of. And I'll be curious whether you think the *Post* allegations or the palace's response are more compelling. But we can get to that in just a little bit because you do such a beautiful job with the history.

And you touched on a number of the key events in your opening. I wanted to work a little bit through the history and then bring up to date on some key issues such as the state of Jerusalem and the Palestinians both within Jordan, as well as beyond. The Syrian civil war, and the overall state today of the U.S.-Jordan relationship. And just how well ensconced King Abdullah is in his position after a recent coup attempt. So, all of that's on the agenda.

But if we could go back a little bit and start with you mentioned that King Hussein took the crown -- or took the throne in 1952 at age 17. And then you mentioned his mistake in the 1967 war. I

wondered if you could just sort of focus on the 1950s and '60s for a minute. And anything else you want to add about the '67 war or just how his overall rule began during that period. Maybe we'll just go through two decades at a time for a minute here and review the history in a little bit more detail.

MR. RIEDEL: Well, in the 1950s, when the king ascended to the throne, Jordan had just acquired the West Bank. It more than doubled its population. And actually, had very attractive real estate. Much more arable land on the West Bank and, of course, the tourist attractions Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The rest of the Middle East looked upon this purchase as illegal. Only two countries in the world recognized Jordan's acquisition of the West Bank, the United Kingdom, the colonial power that had created Jordan and Pakistan, a country with which Jordan has always had a very unique relationship.

In fact, when the king ascended to the throne, the most powerful man in the country was not a Jordanian at all. It was a British soldier, Glubb Pasha as he was known. And then one of the most dramatic early things he did in his reign, King Hussein threw out Glubb Pasha. He said I'm -- we're taking control of our army. We're going to have a Jordanian army run by Jordanians. He didn't do it in the nicest of ways. Glubb Pasha, who had been in the country for two decades, was basically told you have to leave in two hours. He was given overnight as a bit of a compromise. But it did dramatically establish that the king was now running his own country.

Throughout the '50s, there were a series of assassination attempts, coup plots, conspiracies. In 1958, the CIA gave the king crucial information that allowed him to preempt one coup plot. But later in 1958, the British had to send paratroopers back to Jordan in order to keep him in power. So, it was a real roller coaster ride.

In the 1960s, it began to ease up a little bit. Relations with Egypt, a dominant player at the time and a revolutionary player in the region, improved. And then he got swept up in a moment of passion that was produced in May and June of 1967. He didn't listen to the CIA. The CIA was telling him clearly there is no possible way the Arabs can beat Israel, any combination of Arabs. The Arabs will lose in a week. Don't join the war.

But swept up in the passion, he went along. That mistake led to the birth of the fedayeen movement, the Palestinian nationalist movement in Jordan, which almost toppled his throne in 1970 in the

Jordanian civil war. He was able to prevail in 1970 largely because of his own very adept youth elements in power. And since 1970, Jordan has been a relatively stable state. It's had some incidents of terrorism. But compared to its neighbors, it been a remarkably stable and productive country.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. So, now, we're into the period of relative stability. But it's also a time where we're going to now have some big events happening pretty soon in terms of the peace process, in terms, ultimately, of Saddam Hussain's invasion of Kuwait, you know, and the crisis that produced in relations with the United States. This is now -- now, we're entering into the -- maybe we can do sort of the '70s, '80s, and into the early '90s together if you don't mind covering that swath of time and just how would you describe it? And how was it that the king was able to basically take Saddam Hussain's side and still wind up in a favorable light as he neared the end of his almost half century in power?

MR. RIEDEL: The king very wisely realized that the reality of American domestic policies that Jordan was an acceptable provocateur for dealing with Palestinians. The United States in the 1970s was not -- or 1980s, was not going to agree to a deal with Palestine Liberation Organization. Now, whether you think that was smart or wrong, Hussain realized America was not going to do his bidding nor would they deal with them. And he was courted by successive American presidents. Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, H. W. Bush, all courted the king as the solution to the Palestinian problem. And he played it very cagey. He never said yes and he never said no. He always said, well, maybe. What's in it for me?

That as a consequence was how he was able to survive the epic mistake of 1990 when he backed the Iraqis. He backed the Iraqis because through the 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq war, the largest conventional war in the world since the Korean War, Jordan was the conduit for supplies going to Iraq. The highway from Aqaba to Amman and then to the east to Iraq, was just filled with trucks, quarries, constantly 24 hours a day, bringing supplies to Iraq.

That led to a very close relationship between the king and the Saddam Hussain. The king made dozens of trips to Bagdad. He preached the argument that Iraq was holding back the Mullahs and their extremist Islamic ideology. That close relationship blinded him in many ways to the whims of

the Saddam government. It's clear that there were people around him who were telling him this was fake, including his own brother, then Crown Prince Hassan, and quite possibly his fourth wife Queen Noor. He didn't listen to them and he tilted towards the Iraqis in August 1990 and he paid a heavy price for it.

He came to Kennebunkport in Maine for a one-on-one meeting with President Bush, which was absolutely disastrous. Basically, the U.S. cut off all of assistance to Jordan and treated Jordan as a pariah. But H. W. Bush was smart enough to know that when the war was over, he wanted to try to restart the Arab Israeli peace process. And he promised the Saudis and Syrians and everyone else in the build-up to the war, that Jordan was going to be a center. And so, within a matter of months, all was forgiven. Vackroshmant (phonetic) was developed. Jordan was again at the top table and H. W. was there supporting them.

And it's a measure of the king's ability to come back from flawed decisions that at his funeral in 1999, four American presidents showed up, including H. W. Bush, the one who had a disastrous relationship in the summer and fall of 1990.

MR. O'HANLON: It's amazing. And I wanted to just dwell on the personal side for a minute, Bruce, and ask you two questions about relationships that the king had with American presidents and also with Saddam. On the Saddam question, you almost make it sound like the king liked Saddam. Because it's one thing to have a business or economic relationship, it's something else to visit Bagdad dozens of times. So, question number one, did King Hussein actually like Saddam Hussain? And then question number two, of all the American presidents that you just mentioned, with which one did King Hussein have the closest personal rapport?

MR. RIEDEL: The first question's a good one. I think the answer is, yes. Not only did he come and visit with Saddam, they went fishing together and did other things like that. Now, I should say something about fishing in Saddam's Iraq. Fishing in Saddam's Iraq meant throwing a hand grenade in the water letting it explode and having the dead fish come to the surface. Not exactly my idea of a fishing trip. But, yes, they seemed to have bonded. And I think that that blinded King Hussein to the realities of Saddam Hussain's situation.

But bear in mind, the rest of the world backed Saddam Hussain in the Iran-Iraq war too.

The Reagan administration fully endorsed the Iraqis. And by the end of the war, the United States was providing intelligence to the Iraqis. And we were fighting, in essence, an undeclared naval war on the side of the Iraqis against the Iranians in the Gulf. So, Saddam succeeded in, let's say, confusing many, many people.

The American president that I think hands down King Hussein bonded with the most was the last, Bill Clinton.

MR. O'HANLON: Was who? I'm sorry, it cut out a little bit when you said that.

MR. RIEDEL: Was the last, Bill Clinton. I think the relationship between them was very, very close. King Hussein often came to the United States and particularly, of course, the last couple of years before 1999, he came for cancer treatment, medical treatment. And I think that that naturally led to a bond between the president that got very, very close. The president also went out of his way to get Jordan almost everything they wanted. The free trade agreement, F-16 aircraft for the Royal Jordanian Air Force, and, of course, the signing of the Israeli-Iranian Peace Agreement only scented it.

You know, we look back on the 1990s era of the grid process and the Oslo process were hectic really epical events but as a product, the only real product that survived and sustained from all that effort was the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Agreement because it was very important to both of them, particularly important to Israel. Jordan has the longest border of any Arab state with Israel. And since Jordan has a majority Palestinian population, it has a unique relationship with both Palestinians and with the Israelis.

MR. O'HANLON: So, you mentioned the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Accord of the 1990s. Is that really the signature accomplishment of the last decade of the king's life? Clearly, it's one of them. But how would you sum up the 1990s before we get on to King Abdullah and the modern era?

MR. RIEDEL: I think the peace agreement was the pinnacle of the king's life. His grandfather who was assassinated in front of his eyes, literally, had begun secret dialog with Israel. And that dialog predated the 1948 war. And the reason he was assassinated was that he was in Jerusalem to see the Israeli prime minister. For several years after he ascended from the throne, the king kept the Israelis at arm's length. But by the 1960s, he too was engaged in secret dialog with the Israelis, and that

became more intense after the 1967 war. And it was not just a dialog at the top, the Jordanian and Israeli intelligence community shared intelligence about threats to both of them. They shared intelligence with the United States as well about the potential terrorist threats.

The king saw in the Oslo Process when the Palestinians were formally acknowledged by the Israelis as a negotiating partner, his opportunity. He now could make his own peace with Israel and say in effect to the PLO it's up to you to make your peace with Israel. I'm going to make mine. And he ended up making it. But in one of the most important parts, he had the peace treaty recognize that Jordan has an exceptional responsibility in terms of protecting religious sites in Jerusalem. Both the Muslim and Christian religious sites are under a form of Jordanian oversight. Which in practice means that Jordan still does have a role in Jerusalem despite the fact that it lost the 1967 war. That role is very, very important to the Israelis. It gives the king and the Hashemites the degree of legitimacy that is very important for them surviving in power.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, thank you. And I want to now turn towards King Abdullah. But I think I'll pick up if I could just to add one quick small editorial comment, which I know that is an issue you get out in the book as well. But when I was privileged to meet with King Abdullah, the week after Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, it was fascinating to me. I had met him briefly before in the United States. But I don't consider myself, I wouldn't say I'm a friend of the king's, although I'd happily be a friend. He's an impressive individual.

But I was granted a chance to talk and what I was struck by is how much he was fixated on the Jerusalem question and the Islamic and Christian holy sites perhaps more than anything else that seemed to, you know, make him wonder what years of Trump rule in the United States would be like. It seemed above and beyond even the Syrian civil war or any other Middle East issue, the Jerusalem question is what really immediately grabbed his attention out of the Trump campaign, and very much fits with what you're saying.

So, I wanted to ask, now, moving on if we could to King Abdullah and the early years. For example, how did he react to the 9/11 attacks and then the U.S. decision to overthrow Saddam Hussain? What was his role in that particular Iraq conflict? But if you want to also touch on the way in

which the dynastic succession occurred and the considerations that may have been in King Hussein's mind as he decided that Abdullah, in fact, should be his successor rather than anyone else or another son. So, if you could maybe touch on those early years of Abdullah and then we'll go to the modern era.

MR. REIDEL: King Hussein had appointed his half-brother, Hassan, the crown prince for 33 years. And everyone assumed Hassan would ascend to the throne. And probably assumed a little bit too much because the king in the back of his mind, always wanted to have his own son become the king. We now know from various sources that the king had spoken about that privately through various American and Jordanian officials over the years. Never in an official way, but he hinted that he wanted that. And so, literally on his deathbed, Hassan was removed and Abdullah was placed in the line of succession with Queen Noor's oldest son, Hamzah, as the crown prince in government.

I should say just a moment about the funeral. It was really the funeral of the century. Dozens and dozens of heads of state, monarchs, and crown princes, and princesses all showed up. Four American presidents including Bill Clinton. It was really an extraordinary event which took place in the pouring rain which the Jordanians all said it was a sign that God was crying for the passing of King Hussein as well.

The extraordinary funeral helped to propel Abdullah into office. In many ways he was poorly prepared for this. He thought he was going to be a soldier all of his life. Now, he suddenly found himself as king of a small kingdom in a part of the world prone to violence. And the 9/11 attack speeded everything up. He was on his way to the United States literally as the attack took place and had to turn back to Jordan. He came to the United States quickly afterwards. Offered all the help that Jordan could provide including intelligence, but also including on the ground support for the American effort in Afghanistan.

He was troubled by George W. Bush's plans to invade Iraq. He thought that this would only unleash chaos in Iraq and would only benefit the Iranians. But here's one instance where he really learned from his father. His father had had real doubts about the first Gulf War. He enunciated them publicly and laid them out for everyone to see. Abdullah had real doubts about the second Gulf War, but he kept those doubts largely to himself. He expressed them to President Bush privately, but he didn't

make a big public deal out of it. And when push came to shove, he allowed the United States to use Jordan as a base for prosecuting parts of the war, mostly the rescue of downed pilots and things like that.

But he learned from his father's mistake. You may not like it but you can go along with it. And that impressed George W. Bush who continued to support Jordan. And Barack Obama largely inherited that and also forged a pretty strong bond with King Hussein -- I'm sorry -- with King Abdullah.

Thereupon that survived the Arab Spring and to a certain extent survived the Syrian civil war, which was a much bigger challenge to the relationship. The Jordanians, of course, regard Syria as their most immediate threatening state. Syria's been a threat to Jordan almost from the beginning of the kingdom. And the Syrian civil war was in Abdullah's mind, an enormous cause of chaos in the region including sending literally hundreds of thousands of refugees to Jordan. And the king like many Americans wanted Barak Obama to "do something about it". Come up with a solution. But as we all know, Barak Obama didn't have a solution. And he wasn't prepared to invest the resources in the Syrian civil war, which led to some tension in the relationship. Not a rupture of any kind, but some tension.

MR. O'HANLON: So, on that Syrian civil war issue, if I could home in on that with a follow-up question a little bit more. Do you think that the king was basically against our effort to try to unseat Assad even though we never were enthusiastic about it. And as you say, President Obama never figured out how to sort of reconcile his preference to see President Assad go also with his equally strong or stronger desire for the United States not to become overly involved in yet another Middle East quagmire.

Was King Abdullah just against even the idea of unseating Assad? Or did he feel that if we're going to do it, we got to do it right. Got to do it big. Got to do it quick and clean. And maybe he would have been willing to see us do another big overthrow invasion kind of occupation effort if we had really been committed or, you know, exactly where did the king come down on what should have been done about Syria in the context of the Arab Spring and the unrest there?

MR. RIEDEL: I think it was more the second one. If you're going to do it, you got to do it right. You got to put the resources into it. This was a major commitment on our part which may involve in American boots on the ground. But like I would say most of us, while the king had an overall objective of

getting rid of Assad, he too didn't have a very specific how are we going to do this? How do we make the Syrian opposition create a united front that has real credibility given that the visions within it, given the rise of the Al-Qaeda linked factions, the Syrian opposition, and given the fact that the Russians, the Iranians, and Hezbollah, were prepared to put their own troops on the ground in significant numbers.

Like many of us, the king wanted a solution but didn't really have a coherent game plan of how to get there. And today, I think he's come to the conclusion that Assad is here to stay and that they've got to get along with him. Yesterday, in the other news that was breaking, the Jordanian news agency announced that the king had taken a phone call from Bazar Assad. I think it's the first time he's spoken directly to Assad since more than a decade.

MR. O'HANLON: By the way, you've already answered two questions from the audience that came in on Jordan without even trying. So, thank you. But I wanted to follow-up with one while we're on the Jordan question with one more of my own and one more from the audience. The one from the audience is, do you think that King Abdullah has coordinated any of his, you know, detente towards Syria with Washington? Or has that been on his own? And maybe I'll put that one to you first and then come back with the second.

MR. RIEDEL: I think there's no doubt that he raised this with the Biden administration. The king was the first foreign leader, the first Arab Middle Eastern leader that Joe Biden spoke to after the election. And he became the first Middle East leader that Biden spoke to after his inauguration. And this summer, the king and queen came to the United States for a quite long visit. It was three weeks long. That's longer than any summer vacation I had this year. And he traveled all around the United States, including talking to CENTCOM in Tampa and senators and congressmen in the United States. And he had a lengthy discussion with Biden. I'm sure the question of what to do with Syria came up.

I think that the Biden administration does not see Syria as a first-tier issue that's something that needs to be resolved quickly. We haven't heard the let's bring the troops home from Syria message that we heard in the Trump administration, for example. I think the Biden administration is basically willing to just let this play itself out. Which means that if Abdullah wants to try to gain concessions out of Assad for Assad to be returned to the international community, they're happy to let

him try. I think there's serious doubts that he's going to get much, but they're going to let him try. And they also realize that Jordan needs a border with Syria that is stable and that is open that in order to keep its economy going.

MR. O'HANLON: So, let me now, one more question on the broader Syria issue. But it actually is going to take me to Iran and Saudi Arabia too. So, just let me put that all together. And, I guess, the first question is when King Abdullah looks at Syria, does he think at all in sectarian terms? Also, with Iraq. I mean, he's a Sunni Muslim. And almost everyone in Jordan is Sunni Muslim as I understand, including virtually all the Palestinians. But the king to my mind has never been particularly sectarian in his thinking, or at least as best I can tell. I may be wrong. So, please correct me.

But I'm sure that whether he is thinking in sectarian terms, he has Iran on his mind because everybody in the region does. So, that raises the question of what kind of a relationship he is trying to have with Iran. Which also then, obviously, raises the question of his relationship with Saudi Arabia on which he's -- and Jordan's often depended for some financial support over the years, but where there is a certain amount of divergence in outlook on a number of issues.

So, I wonder if you could address the sectarian, the Iranian, and the Saudi questions sort of as part of a whole?

MR. RIEDEL: I think it's important to start with the Hashemites. The Hashemites are literally the descendants.

MR. O'HANLON: You froze up, okay.

MR. RIEDEL: This is not a propaganda argument. Hussein and Abdullah are direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. They come from the Tribe of the Quraish and the family of the Hashem. In that sense, yes, they are Sunnis, but they also like to portray themselves as above sectarian that not only do Sunnis see them as descendants of the Prophet, but Shias see them as descendants of the Prophet as well. So, they're not just descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, they're also descendants of Ali, the figure to whom the Shias regard as the leader of their region.

Now, in practice, the Hashemite Jordanians are all Sunnis. Palestinians, East Bankers, and they are very much (inaudible). On some occasions, King Abdullah has talked in sectarian terms.

After all, he's the -- he was the person who came up with the notion of a Shia crescent, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. He's generally avoided that kind of sectarian language. And he has sought over the years to modulate relations with Iran. He's actually visited Iran, which is pretty unusual for a Arab leader. And in that sense, he has been an opponent of turning the region into a sectarian battle. And he's been privately critical of the Saudis for escalating a Sunni and Shia confrontation as high as they have.

But I think it's safe to say that in the last year, we've seen signs that the Saudis themselves have realized that it's gotten out of control and they're trying to dampen it. And there are ongoing semi-secret conversations between the Saudis and the Iranians going on in Iraq. The king has also tried from the beginning after the United States invasion to buck up the moderates in Iraq. One of the first foreign leaders to go to Bagdad at a time when most of the Arab world was at arm's length from the government in Bagdad because of the Shia government. Because the majority of Iraqis are Shias. So, if you have an election, you're going to get an Iraqi Shia government.

The king despite that, he tried to engage in support for the Iraq government. So, on this issue as on so many others the king tries to play a moderating role trying to deescalate conflict rather than increase the coverage of conflict. To confront terrorism rather to confront the religious (inaudible) entity of people.

MR. O'HANLON: By the way, on that same notion, do you think that if the Israeli-Palestinian peace process ever did resume in a meaningful way again, that the king would try to be a helpful participant or do you think he is at a point now where he views that problem as just so intractable that even if there were the trappings of initial talks, that he would try to stay away?

MR. RIEDEL: The Jordanians both Hussein and Abdullah have talked themselves blue telling American leaders from Eisenhower to Trump, the Israel-Palestinian conflict is a core problem and the failure to address that has all these ripple effects, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, or whatever. I would say with the rare exception of Bill Clinton, they haven't been very successful in persuading American presidents to put in the kind of resources and time behind the effort. And, of course, since Bill Clinton in the end did not succeed, this is not exactly a model that other presidents are likely to follow.

I think they're still determined to try to get agreement. I think they would try very hard to

be hopeful in that regard. But I think they've also come to realize that the current state of leadership both on the Israeli side and the Palestinian side is not conducive to a resolution. Just look at the Palestinian side, Hamas runs Gaza. There's a huge presence in the West Bank. Abu Mazen is long past his cancellation date and there's really no sign of a new emerging Palestinian leader who is going to be able to take on the reins and make the very difficult compromise that would be necessary for any kind of resolution with the Palestinians.

So, yes, they're regarded as absolutely vital and I have no doubt that Biden's got an earful about this. But I think they also realize the chances they're going to move Washington on this (inaudible).

MR. O'HANLON: And that leads to a question from the audience. And now, I'm going to be sort of, you know, interspersing audience questions with a couple more of my own in the remaining 15 minutes or so. But there's a question about Jordan, Israel relations and whether this is a time when they can deepen even beyond the government-to-government level to be more societal, maybe economic. Are there, you know, avenues for possible deepening or strengthening of those kinds of relationships between Israel and Jordan, irrespective of what may happen with the peace process?

MR. RIEDEL: Well, King Abdullah and Benjamin Netanyahu had a terrible relationship. It all goes back to a plot by the Israelis, first Netanyahu, to assassinate a prominent Hamas leader literally on the streets of Amman. I had the good fortune, yes, misfortune of being put on the phone when King Hussein called Bill Clinton absolutely out of his mind, angry at Benjamin for doing this. The president wasn't available so I got the earful from the king on this.

His son has the same posture. With the departure of Benjamin there is a noticeable change in mood. Abdullah has met with the new Israeli leadership. There are partnership agreements on water, on air traffic. There's been notable change of mood. Whether this will translate into more is anyone's guess. It's very difficult to move the Jordanian people. The majority of Jordanians are, of course, are Palestinians or of Palestinian origin. They see the Israelis as their enemy. They tolerate the peace agreement. They understand it's to their advantage to have a peace agreement, but they're not enthusiastic about it. They certainly are not enthusiastic about having lots of Israelis come to Amman.

And Israelis have not been enthusiastic about going to Amman.

So, the human dimension to it may still be a laggard. But I think there is real possibility for bilateral relationship to improve and to provide real economic gain to both parties.

MR. O'HANLON: I'll put in a personal advertisement. I went to Amman once and I loved it. So, to the extent that it's worth encouraging any further tourism or whatnot. People think of Patras, but I also just think the city is fascinating.

I wanted to ask you though coming -- speaking of locales of real estate. Now, let's come back to the *Washington Post* and this new development in the relationship, which may or may not prove consequential that somehow not unlike a number of other rich people or leaders around the world, the king of Jordan has saw to buy up more real estate than he really could plausibly need, than his country could plausibly easily afford, and more than he was willing to acknowledge. And now, it's been unearthed as you pointed in sharing this morning with me a press release from the palace in Jordan.

They pushed back pretty hard and said, you know what, speaking of assassination attempts, it's probably prudent that some of these properties not have their addresses disclosed because the king may be there. And moreover, most heads of state have more than one place where they can receive guests or potentially, you know, have a secure vacation. And that's not unusual and the king does have a certain amount of wealth associated with his position. It's that personal wealth that he's used to acquire these places in California and London, maybe one or two other locations as well.

Where do you come down on this story? Do you think the *Washington Post* had any reasonableness in the sort of tough attack it levied at the king? Do you think his defense is compelling?

MR. RIEDEL: I think the *Post's* already left out a few key points. Let me start by saying this, the timing is terrible. This past March, the Jordanians uncovered a very large conspiracy in the (inaudible) which was talking about sort of in somewhat vague terms corruption in the royal palace, and the need for Abdullah to step aside and King Hussein's son with Queen Noor, Hamzah, to become the king.

Several of Hamzah's senior aides have been arrested and are in prison. Hamzah, himself, was more or less put under a gag order. Even more disturbing for the Jordanians, there was

concrete evidence that the Saudis were supporting this conspiracy with money and (inaudible).

So, the timing is terrible. The whole question of corruption in the kingdom has now risen very much to the surface particularly at a time when because of COVID, there are no tourists in Jordan. The major source of foreign income has gone away. So, Jordanians are hurting. And here comes this story that the king has \$100 million worth of private property. I don't think anyone naysays in his right to own property. And after all, he does need to travel to Washington and London for heads of state visits. You're absolutely right, he needs to be able to go to those places to a spot where security is going to be strong and where he'll have some privacy.

The condos in Georgetown, remember his son, Hussain, went to school in Georgetown. And other members of the royal family go to school in Georgetown. They have every reason to have a property where they feel safe and secure and which is not publicized on the outside. What I think hurts him is two things. One, is that all these transactions were done outside the public domain, which while not illegal by any means, raises questions of propriety. And then secondly, I think the property in Malibu comes across to most people as a little bit over the top for the king of a country that is as poor as Jordan is.

Their response? I thought their response was quite well done. Clear, to the point, emphasizing there's no allegation here of the misuse of Jordanian government funds and that this is private wealth. And that there are good security reasons for why it's done. All that said, this is the timing is terrible. It'll raise endless questions. And, of course, there's always the number one question, where did the money come from? This is a family that has a really -- look, it started out dirt poor. King Hussein's mother sold his bicycle when he was 13 because they were so strapped for cash.

How did they get this money? Well, part of the answer is over the years, King Hussein had begun to acquire money too. King Hussein had an absolutely fantastic house in Maryland called the River House. I had the good fortune of visiting several times. This was really quite a mansion. They ended up selling it to the owner of the Washington, then Washington Redskins. Now, Washington no-name football team. So, there was money. They also had two residences in London. So, that's part of the answer.

Another part of the answer is Emirati friends. Jordan has a long-established close relationship with the United Arab Emirates. King Abdullah's half-sister Aiyah was married to the crown prince of Dubai for many, many years. They broke up. But I suspect that some of this money is from Emirati money that was given to the king and queen with some nice places to live.

This case, this is a question of appearances. The appearances don't look good. And the statement's a smart move, if I was advising the king, I would say you need to go a little bit (inaudible). Maybe it's time to dispense with some of these properties or find a different way to have them kept in legal terms so that it's more than a private property of one individual.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Very thorough and thoughtful answer. Very fair. I have two last questions. And I think there's a natural logic to them because picking up on this issue of corruption, and Jordan's relative poverty. I wanted to ask you about sort of the health of Jordanian society and the economy. A snapshot today but also your prognosis for the future. And then that leads naturally to the final question, which would be what's your prognosis for the future of the U.S.-Jordan relationship based on all the historical and contemporary analysis that you've provided? So, if we could start with the Jordanian economy as well as more generally with strength of society, educational systems, economic opportunities, et cetera. How would you assess that right now?

MR. RIEDEL: When the British created Jordan, literally a century ago in 1921, Winston Churchill created what he liked to say, he had a free afternoon in Jerusalem and created the Emirate of Transjordan in that free afternoon. The British also called Jordan a vacant lot that there was really nothing there. And they were right. It was a little bit of arable land along the Jordan Valley. Amman in those days, I'd say a borderline village to town with practically no people. There was really nothing to this.

Now, a century later, there's 10 million Jordanians. Many of them refugees from other countries. They're not prosperous. They don't have the lifestyles of gutteries. They don't have oil. They do have Patras. Unfortunately, in the pandemic, few of us are traveling around the world to go to archeological places. As the pandemic eases, that will ease and I'm confident the tourists will go back and that will help the economy.

I would answer your question this way. Jordanians are smart enough to know it's not just a question of how are they doing? It's a question of how are they doing in relationship to their neighbors? And I think the answer to that is they're doing pretty well. We're not 10 years into a brutal civil war that has torn our country apart like Syria. We're not at 50 years into a brutal civil like Lebanon, a basically dissolved country. We're not occupied by the Israelis as the Palestinians on the other side of the curtain are. We haven't had endless wars and endless uprisings as the Iraqis have. And we, thankfully, are not bogged down in a quagmire in Yemen like the Saudis are. So, life is, you know, in part, how do you think you're doing yourself? But it's also how are you doing in response to your neighbors? And here I think the king benefits a lot from Jordanians knowing that while they may not be living the high life, they're not living under occupation or under the constant threat of war and aerial bombardment.

Even when they look at Egypt, they're not living under a military dictatorship that is as hardline as the military occupation involved in Egypt. So, I think that's a very big source of stability (inaudible) they're doing better than most anyone else around them.

The U.S.-Jordanian relationship, I think, is set to prosper. Jordan had the four tough years with Donald Trump. He made it clear in his first foreign visit that his heart was with the Saudis and the Israelis, and that Jordan wasn't on his list. The king tried very hard to build a relationship with Trump, but after the end of a year or so, he'd come to the conclusion there was no there there.

The deal of the century that Trump proposed for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would have been a disaster for Jordan. Annexation of the Jordan River Valley might have led to the termination of the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement. I think one of the reasons why the UAE was able to get the Abraham Accords through was even Israelis realized that the annexation of the West Bank Jordan River Valley would lead to a disastrous disruption in the Israeli-Jordanian agreement.

Now, Joe Biden may not be eager to jump into the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, but he's not going to push, you know, that it's so disastrous. And when he did make his phone call supporting the king after the discovery of the conspiracy, he went out of his way to say not only did he support the king, but he supported the two states solution. Now, the two-state solution may be all we get. But nobody in the Middle East with the possible exceptions of a few extremists, want to see the

two-state solution quickly buried. It is important to at least keep the concept of the two-state solution alive. And Joe Biden's going to do that.

I think Biden will look at this *Washington Post* story and say so what? It doesn't change the fact that Jordan's lynchpin is that King Abdullah is a moderate friend of the United States who provides us space to operate to deal with ISIS and Al-Qaeda and who has been a consistent supporter of American counterterrorism efforts throughout the region. I think Joe Biden with his years and years of experience in foreign policy, literally decades, knows that Jordan is a friend that he wants to keep in our corner and he's not going to try to collect taxes in Malibu.

MR. O'HANLON: And presumably will continue to try to provide U.S. financial support of various kinds to development efforts as well, in addition to the free trade agreement we already have, correct?

MR. RIEDEL: Jordan is now the number three recipient of American foreign assistance. Which is really quite remarkable for a small country to be (inaudible) and is a reflection of the importance that most American politicians in both parties recognize this.

MR. O'HANLON: Bruce, it's a remarkable book on the U.S.-Jordan friendship and relationship dating back about 70 years that you cover in this very impressive study. Thank you for the last hour and the privilege of speaking with you about it. I know we all join in in congratulating and I would encourage everyone to buy this fantastic book as we get into holiday gift season, but also as we think about the future of the Middle East and the future of the Biden administration's policy in that part of the world. So, congrats again. Thanks for joining and signing off from Brookings.

MR. RIEDEL: Thank you, Mike.

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