

ISSUES

- Jordan is a long-time strategic partner of the U.S. but is going through a period of intense strain exacerbated by the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus crisis. Jordan has dealt well with the health impact of the pandemic, with around 2,000 cases and 15 deaths recorded, but the economy is expected to shrink by 3-5%.
- Jordan did not support the Trump administration's so-called Peace Plan and warned Israel against going ahead with annexations on the West Bank. It had a muted response to the UAE-Israel normalization deal, as a wide cross-section of Jordanian public opinion — particularly those of Palestinian origin — regarded it as a dangerous betrayal. The foreign minister emphasized that the assessment of the deal would be in what comes after it: will Israel resume the path toward annexation after a pause, and can the agreement be used to revive talks toward a two-state solution.
- Jordan also hosts over 650,000 registered Syrian refugees, although according to the government the total number, including those not registered, is almost 1.2m. The refugees are mainly housed in dedicated camps. Health conditions in the camps have been managed reasonably well, but access to food and resources have become more challenging as international aid declines.
- Jordan has a significant radicalization and jihadist challenge, linked to developments in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. The security apparatus is active and effective, and the government provides some political space to encourage more moderate Islamists who are willing to play by the state's rules.
- Unemployment is estimated to be over 20 percent. The unemployed are mostly educated and female participation in the labor market is very low.

US INTERESTS

- Jordan is a primary security partner in the war on terror and the goals of regional security and stability.
- Jordan is a main partner in finding a way forward in the Israel-Palestine conflict and working toward a broader Arab-Israeli peace.
- The U.S. has a keen interest in the continued survival and stability of the Jordanian state, as the alternative — a failed state — would create a host of threats and challenges for the U.S. and its partners in the region, both in terms of radicalization and terrorist groups, as well as refugees and humanitarian crises.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maintain close and supportive relations with Jordan, including continued military and security cooperation, support for refugees, and encouragement of investment and trade relations between the two countries.
- Recognize that Jordan is one of the countries most affected by regional tensions and conflict, especially those in Israel-Palestine, Syria, and Iraq.
 - * Build on the UAE-Israel normalization agreement by dissuading the Israeli government from reviving the move toward annexation, and forging a way back toward Israeli-Palestinian talks and a semblance of a process that could lead to the only viable long-term option: a two-state solution.
 - * The country also pays a heavy price for the ongoing conflict in Syria. The faster that Syrian refugees can return to Syria, and the sooner that Jordan can restore secure borders and revive bilateral economic relations, the better it will be for Jordan.
 - * The ongoing unrest in Iraq is another major issue. It fuels domestic security concerns, and it also means that the Jordanian economy foregoes the benefits that would accrue to it from a stable and prosperous Iraq.