

JORDAN

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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. As a result of the pandemic, the economy is expected to shrink by up to 5.5%. Jordan's growth is projected to remain low considering a prolonged decline in economic activity because of precautionary lockdowns and curfew measures. This will leave Jordan heavily reliant on foreign aid in 2021-22.
- 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. As the temperature goes down, a more level-headed assessment will consider whether the agreement can be used to revive talks toward a two-state solution.
- Jordan also hosts over 660,000 registered Syrian refugees, although according to the government the total number, including those not registered, is almost 1.2m. Only 20% of them are housed in dedicated camps. Access to food and resources has become more challenging as international aid declines. The impact of the pandemic has pushed both refugees and their host communities into poverty. Poverty rates have increased by 38% among host communities and 18% among Syrian refugees, requiring a quick response by international organizations.
- Jordan has a significant radicalization and jihadist challenge, precipitated by perceived economic and political marginalization and linked to developments in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. Opaque decision-making contributes to perceptions of widespread corruption and public disillusionment. The security apparatus is active and effective, and the government provides closely managed political space tolerating more

moderate Islamists who are willing to play by the state's rules. High internet penetration creates significant potential for communications technology to be used as a mobilization instrument.

- Unemployment is estimated to be over 20%. Unemployment is especially high among youth, reaching about 40%, which is a cause of concern and potential unrest. Jordan has one of the lowest female labor participation rates in the world.

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 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.
- Leverage economic assistance to enunciate for the government incremental and meaningful reforms to relieve political discontentment and preempt potentially destabilizing socio-economic conditions. In this regard, ensure that USAID, the largest in country official development assistance player, delivers holistic programming that addresses the systemic

nature of current challenges and helps to measurably move Jordan toward more effective institutions that are accountable to the people.

- Recognize that Jordan is one of the countries most affected by regional tensions and conflict, especially those in Israel-Palestine, Syria, and Iraq.
 - Dissuade 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 situation in Iraq is another major issue. An unstable Iraq fuels domestic security concerns and means that the Jordanian economy foregoes the benefits that would accrue to it from a stable and prosperous neighbor.