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[2022-04-19-sant-mec-almanac-13.mp3](#)

Transcript

Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to Almanack the Oxford Middle East podcast. My name is Curtis Caucus, and today I'm joined by Matthew Smith and guide Thin to discuss the Kingdom of Jordan.

Speaker 2

We covered the conflicts of identity between the East and West bankers. The severe economic issues the country faces, and how these trends have led to a widely publicised rift in a historically stable royal family.

Speaker 3

The Hashemite Kingdom.

Speaker 3

Has long been viewed as a reliable partner at a crossroads in the Middle East, but its economy is struggling this year. Unemployment jumped to 25%. Exports and tourism or down.

Speaker 3

Syrian refugees tax an overburdened system.

Prince Hamzah is a popular.

Speaker 5

Figure and certainly amongst a certain group.

Particularly East Bank tribal.

Speaker 5

Community, he's indicating a rift as society.

Speaker 5

Has been talking about.

Speaker 5

You remember the late King Hussein. The father was very popular among the people because at the Jordan was economically stable.

Speaker 4

I wanted to make this recording so it is clear to the world, but what you see in here in terms of the official line is not a reflection of the realities on the ground. Unfortunately, this country has become stymied in corruption in nepotism and in this rule.

Speaker 2

Hello everyone, welcome to this episode on the recent developments in Jordan. Guy is going to be looking at the role of the Palestinians.

Speaker 2

Matthew is going to be looking at the role of the tribes and I'll be discussing the economic issues and the foreign intervention and aid which Jordan has seen the last few years. But to understand.

Speaker 2

All these issues I thought we should start with the backgrounds of guy. Could you talk a bit about the role of the Palestinians in in Jordan, please?

Speaker 6

Of course, Jordan and Israel, Palestine used to be the same administrative place under the British.

Speaker 6

And then when the State of Israel was created and you had Palestinian refugees coming out from Israel, Palestine along ended up in the West, in the east Bank of the River Jordan, which is Jordan, and which had been created as Jordan by the British, and given to the Hashemites. So today we don't really know the exact numbers of Palestinians in Jordan.

Speaker 6

It's estimated there are.

Speaker 6

About 5,000,000, probably more, which is about half the population. 18% of them live in refugee camps when the rest live in cities and the countryside.

Speaker 6

There has been conflict between the Palestinians and the Jordanian Government in the.

Speaker 6

Past, but due to their shared history and similar culture, they're pretty homogeneous.

Speaker 6

In terms of religion, Jordanians and Palestinians going pretty well, and of course they've mixed quite a lot in the previous decades.

Speaker 6

A lot of them have different status because of various historical circumstances, so I suppose the least fortunate ones at the moment would be the Palestinian refugees from Syria.

Speaker 6

Who aren't given the same citizenship rights? Most of the Palestinians in Jordan, which is unlike other Middle Eastern states.

Speaker 6

Most of the Palestinians do have citizenship rights, and they do have rights from the states. They would be considered Jordanian outside of Jordan, but north and have citizenship, and amongst those who prove their lab citizenship you have firstly the ones.

Speaker 6

I mentioned the Palestinians from Syria and that's I think, because Jordan didn't want to.

Speaker 6

Encourage Bashar al Assad to kick out the Palestinians, who are mostly supporting the rebels against the Syrian regime. So they're worried that you'd have the same situation as you have in Israel.

Speaker 6

Palestine, which is where if Jordan says.

Speaker 6

We'll take you all in then. The regime in the country feels free to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians.

Speaker 6

And Krishnan to Jordan as an alternative phone, which is why there's this big fear about Jordan being thought of as an alternative. Palestine or US alternative for the Palestine.

Speaker 6

Means I'm another group that are not treated so well at the gardens. They similar situation they don't have the same citizenship rights.

Speaker 6

West Bank and Jordan were both under the Jordanian regime after 1948, when Jordan annexed it up until 1988, when the king severed all administrative.

Speaker 6

And all the administrative cotised at the height of the First Intifada. During that time, West Bank and Jordan was sort of considered he was trying to push them into being the same place one country. It wasn't the same case for Gaza, and the girls had never really got the same citizenship rights.

Speaker 6

In the West Bank as well, you'll have different forms of levels of citizenship. You can have a green card and a.

Speaker 6

Yellow card.

Speaker 6

Depending on whether you're a West Bank citizen living in the West Bank, or whether you're originally from the West Bank and now living in Jordan. Unfortunately, because of the Israeli.

Speaker 6

Education it means that if the Israelis doing if the Israelis failed to renew.

Speaker 6

The residency status of the Palestinians in the West Bank. Then they might also lose their Jordanian nationality, so there's also different.

Speaker 6

Layers to the.

Speaker 6

Citizenships and right statuses of the Palestinians in Jordan.

Speaker 3

Thank you very much.

Speaker 2

In Jordan, yeah, both the West Bank is. So basically the Palestinians, but you also have these banks and they are.

Speaker 2

For lack of a better word, the original Jordanian. So Matthew would you like to say a bit about them, please?

Speaker 7

Sure, so yeah, like you said, the east bankers are the ones who consider themselves the indigenous inhabitants of Jordan.

Speaker 7

They're the tribes that were there, obviously before the waves of Palestinian refugees, and before even Amir Abdullah the 1st and the Great Arabour vault. So these tribes do have a historic place in the modern state of Jordan.

Speaker 7

They've consistently said.

Speaker 7

Served loyally, both statesman either in the Jordanian parliament or in other roles, but also soldiers in the Arab Legion and the Jordanian Army.

Speaker 7

They have historic.

Speaker 7

Loyalty to the Hashemite kings who now Rule Jordan have ruled Jordan since the Great Arab Revolt, because they participate in the Great Arab Revolt under Sharif Hussein. And then afterwards, Sharif Hussein.

Speaker 7

Two sons become monarchs in the Levant.

Speaker 7

So Faisal originally in Syria, then later in Iraq and his other son Abdullah, becomes the emir of Transjordan and in return for the such political loyalty of the tribes, the Jordanian monarchs historically starting with Abdullah, the first, granted these tribes special political status, so they have certain autonomy.

Speaker 7

In terms of legal systems and such things, and you know the most significant Jordanian monarch of probably the last century, King Hussein, hugely respected by the East Bank tribes because he's seen as more of a.

Speaker 7

He's seen as sort of a connecting piece to this original idea of the Great Arab Revolt through his grandfather Abdullah.

Speaker 7

The first adult, the first made sure that Hussein was spent a lot of time with the tribes understood their culture, lived with them for a while. So these the tribes, especially as King Hussein.

Speaker 7

Older really had this sort of connexion to the Jordanian monarchy, and because of that they had a lot of trust, and there was a lot of back and forth with King Hussein on these special political rights with the tribes that you know were later rolled back actually by Abilata second, which we'll talk a little more about when we get into.

Speaker 7

The coup attempt that was in last March. These tribes have also historically been as of recent, actually not historically a source of opposition to the Jordanian monarchy, so there's issues between Abdullah II, some of the tribes and some of the most vocal critics are the shakes, especially the tribes in northern Jordan.

Speaker 7

Who criticise the power of the king, especially the power of Queen Rania and some of the decisions she's made as of recent and domestic politics in Jordan.

Speaker 7

And the reason they can do that is because often these shakes also serve as senators in the Jordanian Parliament, so they have a large audience they can appeal.

Speaker 7

2 they're embedded in the political system, so it's sort of the best way for the tribes to voice their frustration about the Hashemite monarchy.

Speaker 2

Unsurprisingly, like with this level of complexity, both from the Palestinian side and from the Jordanian tribes as well, like their has, this has led to like a quite dysfunctional.

Speaker 2

Government in Jordan. The power politics within the country are very intricate because of many domestic stakeholders which the monarchy as to violence and something which happens is that the as part of the the social contract which Matthew described like jobs.

Speaker 2

Within the government often go to the east bankers in order to reward them for their loyalty.

Speaker 2

To the regime.

Speaker 2

And the consequence of this has been that the government is spending 65% of its total budget on public sector salaries and pensions, which is an obscene amount of money, and another 17 percent is spent on debt. But we will get that later. But in effect, that basically means that only 20%.

Speaker 2

Of the government budget can be spent.

Speaker 2

And unlike things such as health care and education creates quite a large amount of problems in the electoral districts because believe it or not, Jordan does have elections.

Speaker 2

They are also gerrymandered in such a way to reduce the power of the West Bank as the Palestinians often tend to live in the more urbanised areas in order to benefit the.

Speaker 2

These bankers who tend to live in the more rural areas. There have been several attempts to improve the situation of the government in Jordan.

Speaker 2

There's currently the 4th Committee to improve, like the political situation, but the three ones which have appeared in the past. All of their recommendations have been shelved Oregon.

Speaker 2

Hold and so there's quite little faith among Jordanians and even among international watchers that anything is going to change because it is a difficult system to untangle simply because of the amount of vested interest in maintaining it as it is, even though it is a highly unsustainable system and one of the reasons which we'll get onto now.

Speaker 2

Is the importance of national identity and guy you mentioned that Palestinians from Gaza are not given the same rights as Palestinians from the West Bank because they don't, or because the Jordanian Government doesn't want Jordan to become like a second home for Palestinians? Can you say a bit more about that?

Speaker 6

The Israeli right wing, especially the Likud.

Speaker 6

And has had this idea that Jordan can function as an alternative to Palestine as another a Palestinian state. And so they say, why do we need a padding Palestinian state in the West Bank?

Speaker 6

There's already a Palestinian state on the East Bank, and Jordan is terrified of this. Obviously, if you when you had the initial waves.

Speaker 6

Of refugees it was quite destabilising you had the war you had black September in 1971.

Speaker 6

Largely because of this massive influx of refugees, a lot of people assumed that the Jordanian regime wasn't going to last.

Speaker 6

It created a lot of instability, a lot of violence, so it's not surprising that this idea of Jordan becoming a Palestinian state really terrify's the regime.

Speaker 6

Not to mention the the regime are not actually, they're not Palestinian. They're originally from a voice now Saudi Arabia and the hazards they don't want to.

Speaker 6

Have a Palestinian government. They want a Jordanian Hashemite supporting government which is, as Matthew said, based off a lot of the tribes but also with help from the Circassians.

Speaker 2

And two other situations.

Speaker 6

These captions are a also refugee people. They were kicked out of Circasia, which is next to Chechnya and in the caucuses it used to be part of the hospital empire, but it was invaded by Russia a couple of times and one of those times less Circassians were.

Speaker 6

Taken by your team, empire taken in given refuge but strategically reduced.

Speaker 6

Posted around the region and one of the places they were deposited in was the abandoned sparsely inhabited city of our man, so it's the Circassians who really founded there man, and when the hash might survive they made a alliance with the Circassians who had been sent in to tame the desert to tame these. The Bedouin of the area, who had been harassing.

Speaker 6

Pilgrims on their way to Mecca.

Speaker 6

And even today I think most of the security services will be of Circassian origin.

Speaker 2

That's mega interesting. I didn't know that and then obviously that's one side of national identity question. The other side of national identity question is how the tribes look at it, and a good way to know how the tribes look at it is how they look at the two most recent kings, UM, who's sign? And Abdullah to 2nd? So Matthew, please.

Speaker 2

Go ahead.

Speaker 7

Yeah, so the events. I would say from sort of the end of King Hussein's reign in the 90s to the coup that just to the attempted coup that just occurred in March 2021. Almost like a Shakespeare play. So you have King Hussein, who's wildly popular he has. Like I said, he has this humble upbringing.

Speaker 7

If you actually read some King Hussein biographies, he talks about how, despite Abdullah his grandfather being king of Jordan when he was a boy, he actually had a sister who died during the winter in Amman because his house didn't have heat and she got pneumonia and died.

Speaker 7

So he does have a really, really humble upbringing actually, for probably.

Speaker 7

The most important king in Jordan history, so the tribes respect that because the tribes also, you know, a lot of these areas up until the mid to late 20th century were heavily impoverished and things like that.

Speaker 7

So they I can identify with that struggle that sort of King Hussein had as a boy. But then, like I also said, Abdullah.

Speaker 7

The first made sure that his grandson really understood the tribes that like these are the people who sort of we build our state upon so. These are the people who we have to understand.

Speaker 7

So you know King Hussein gets lots of respect not early in in the early part of his reign there's some issues with the tribes, but as he moves on and becomes an older king, lots and lots of respect from the tribes consistently, and so you know King Hussein has a lot of sons, the oldest of which is.

Speaker 7

Abdullah, who becomes King Abdullah the 2nd, but his favourite son was actually Hamzah Prince Hamzah.

Speaker 7

And when King Hussein was dying, he actually wanted Hamza to be king. But he recognised that Hamza is probably not old enough to be king with King Hussein.

Speaker 7

You know becoming.

Speaker 7

King very young. He understood the pressures of a young king and he didn't want Hamza to go through that because Hamza was only 18. So he at the last minute sort of he changes it and makes King Abdullah.

Speaker 7

Well, that time Prince Abdullah Crown Prince, he becomes Abdullah II of Jordan with the promise from his oldest son that Hamza will stay the Crown Prince.

Speaker 7

And when you know Hamza is old enough to be King, Hamza will become king. That promise is kept by Abdullah when he becomes king in 1999, but in 2009.

Speaker 7

He goes back on his promise and Abdullah II makes his own son Hussein, the Crown Prince, who if Hussein becomes king of Jordan, he'll become Hussein, the second Hamza and Abdullah are two very polarising figures in Jordanian politics, especially among the tribes. Hussein sort of put Hamza through the same education. If you want to call it that.

Speaker 7

That Abdullah, the first put him through so he really understands the tribes and their traditions.

Speaker 7

He lived among them for a while, even while he was Crown Prince. He would go see the the tribesmen celebrate tribal festivals with them, talk to them in their actual dialect, talk about, you know tribal politics, things like water rights, agriculture, things that you know, Hamza understands.

Speaker 7

Abdullah has always sort of been viewed as out of touch with the tribes. Abdullah was mostly educated outside of Jordan, either in the UK or in the US, and.

Speaker 7

Actually didn't speak modern standard Arabic until he became king, so I've when I was in Jordan, my Arabic teachers would tell us that if you listen to some of King Abdullah II's first few speeches, he actually sounds like you know, like what we as westerners when we try and learn futsal like. Well, we sound like when we start, it's very slow and.

Speaker 7

You know, sometimes just to stop and sort of catch himself. Case endings aren't always really right, you know so, but that's a big deal because these tribesmen speak kulo.

Speaker 7

We'll King Abdullah I. I'm sure he speaks colloquial now, but at the time he didn't even speak fossa, whereas has always spoken the dialect, so there's a lot of relation there and then the biggest sort of nail in the coffin I would say, was when King Abdullah sort of took some of the special status away from the tribesmen.

Speaker 7

Politically and sort of like you.

Speaker 7

Said Philtre that you know some of these high ranking positions were given to bank as like like kickbacks for political and economic development allies.

Speaker 2

I I just wanted to jump in quickly on like the the Western aspect of of King Abdullah de 2nd and the fact that as you mentioned, he didn't speak.

Speaker 2

Very good Arabic. He didn't have a close connexion with the tribes and his perspective on how to develop the country was also very much in like the Western way of thinking.

Speaker 2

Thing because central to his sort of national policy. Or you could say, was to prioritise a vast amount of the business in in Jordan. For example, he would privatise the phosphate industry, which is one of the major Jordanian money makers. He would privatise.

Speaker 2

The banking sector, which is also an essential a very important sex in in the Jordanian economy and the result of this without going into too much detail is that profits which are being made in Jordan are then instead of being reinvested into Jordan. Go for example to Saudi Arabian banks that has had a disastrous effects on the economy.

Speaker 2

'cause since 2009 the per capita GDP has actually declined in Jordan. So on an individual level people are poorer despite the economic or the economy growing.

Speaker 2

Just because the population has increased so fast, it has doubled in the last 20 years. As a result, a large number of people work in the untaxed, informal economy.

Speaker 2

And they they also like job security. They like benefits. And of course stability.

Speaker 2

And the fact that they don't get taxed is problematic for the government, which is in effect becoming poorer and poorer because of the poor economic situation in Jordan.

Speaker 2

A large amount of titanium work in the Gulf, it's estimated as 3/4 of a million work in the UAE and Casa in Oman and in Saudi Arabia.

Speaker 2

And Saudi Arabia is the most important of this country, where about half a million Jordanians work. And this has obviously given Saudi Arabia vast amount of influence over Jordan will get a bit more into that later. But more importantly, these remittances which these two danians send back home.

Speaker 2

Uh council between 5 and 10% of Jordan's GDP, and considering how disastrous decoded pandemic was for big companies all over the world, it was especially disastrous for that of Jordan because these remittances were no longer being sent home because the people or the Jordanians worked in the Gulf no longer had a job.

Speaker 2

They also lost one of their most important sectors, tetori sector, which accounts for about 20% of GDP. Because everybody wants to see Petra. And that's again meant that the economic situation was extremely dire. This, however, is not a new development.

Speaker 2

Because the economic situation in Jordan has, as I said, been poor for at least the last 10 years, and arguably for even longer after the Iraq invasion by EU.

Speaker 2

S in 2003 trade with Iraq obviously created after the Syrian civil war started in 2000 and 1112 trade with Syria.

Speaker 2

Negatively affected and since then they have been given regular IMF loans, but these have been incredibly unpopular because the IMF often incur.

Speaker 2

It is Jordan to increase taxes and cut spending. Considering how important spending is to keep both the East bankers happy with jobs and the general population happy with subsidies for bread and fuel, this is a very, very politically sensitive topic and the IMF knows that higher taxes are unsustainable.

Speaker 2

So they therefore recommend better tax collection, but that's much easier said than done when so many today means don't work in the formal economy. Jordan also receives a vast amount of money from the US. It's the 2nd.

Speaker 2

Biggest RC is the third biggest recipient of the USA after Israel, Afghanistan, but I think after their recent withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban probably does not receive that much aid anymore and they also receive a large amount of money from the GCC country. So that would be especially Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. But we'll get.

Speaker 2

Into that, a bit more later, but this again gives this country. It's a huge amount of influence over Jordan, which is quite politically unpopular within the country, because nobody likes the feeling that their regime is a proper route.

Speaker 2

Team for other countries to linked what we're going to say next the the night. If you could say so, the horsemen of the privatisation was a man called Boston Modella who was effort recall correctly the Jordanian Minister of Finance in the 2000s and after that was the chief of the.

Speaker 2

Royal Court for a while.

Speaker 2

And then became a special envoy from Saudi Arabia to Jordan. He has been arguably the face of the coup which we saw in in in Jordan early last year.

Speaker 2

In March in 2021, and people were very happy that he was finally prison because as I mentioned, he was the face of.

Speaker 2

Privatisation as well, which was incredibly unpopular 'cause it's increased inequality.

Speaker 2

But the crew is in the end. Why this episode is relevant nowadays, so Matthew would you like to explain about the coup and like why it happened? All we think it happens and who wasn't looking.

Speaker 7

Yeah, we're not sure like we're not sure really what happened yet, but so far what we know at this point almost a year out.

Speaker 7

So yeah, supposedly this was a a coup. Like you said, backed by some of the tribesmen to replace King Abdullah II with Prince Prince Hamza.

Speaker 7

And you know it was foiled. It was right around. Actually. I remember because I was at home, which would be odd during an academic year, but I'm right around Easter if I remember.

Speaker 7

So Hamza was after that for a brief time. He was putting her house arrest because the government claimed that he sought to promote sedition with the gold, destabilising Jordan.

Speaker 7

Charity and then later all these ties sort of came out with this business associate from Saudi Arabia and they announced that the government, the German government, announced that they believed the plot had foreign backing and they linked Hamza to these Saudi business associates and some business associates in Israel that obviously hasn't been proven.

Speaker 7

Uhm, yet, but it's.

Speaker 7

It's speculation as you know, victims of coups like to do when they're foiled, and then after that, though what we see across the country, which right after the coup happened there was a lot of reporting both in the New York Times, Washington Post Financial Times on CNN. So there was a lot of attention, but then, sort of the fallout after the initial.

Speaker 7

Foiling of the coup really hasn't got a lot of attention, so so yeah, someone who has reported a lot.

Speaker 7

On what has still been happening in Jordan is now Bullis, with the LA Times and he reported that a series of about 18 arrests in tribal communities alone occurred after the plot was discovered and these would occur in very sort of.

Speaker 7

Historically autocratic ways. So things we often see coming out of like places say like Russia or Saudi Arabia, where black cubes would roll up and they would raid. Houses come in and arrest people and then take off.

Speaker 7

Which is something that since I would say Black September and the shutdown of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, really the the general population has not seen that sort of repression in Jordan.

Speaker 7

So that was shocking and all the trials everybody was arrested have been transferred over to a public prosecutor.

Speaker 7

Which gives the tribespeople hope that there will be some fair, some semblance of Fair justice.

Speaker 7

Yes, except which this is also a big issue. Prince Hamza's Prince they've announced that Prince Hamza will be dealt with by order of the king in the framework of the royal family.

Speaker 7

So this very vague sort of legal system that the royal family operates in, and that's really that angered a lot of the tribes, people and the Hashemite family.

Speaker 7

Just the last little point, which usually is able to keep its sort of feuds within the palace. You know people don't see them in public. A lot of this actually did play out on Twitter.

Speaker 7

Queen Noor, who is Prince Hamza's mother, tweeted, saying that if there's an investigation you know Hamza will be exonerated.

Speaker 7

There's no wrongdoing. But then Princess Fury, oh Fury Al, who is the sister of the late King Hussein, responded to north tweet and she said, this is quote seemingly blind.

Speaker 7

Ambition of Queen Noor and her son.

Speaker 7

And that is delusional. Few trial and unmerited and at the end she you know in a very sort of Arab older female relative way told all of the boys you she said grow up boys you know.

Speaker 5

'cause also it's important.

Speaker 7

So yeah.

Speaker 2

To note, note that Queen Noor is the wife of the late King Hussein, right?

Speaker 7

Yeah, she well she's the.

Speaker 7

Last wife of King Hussein so King Hussein did have three wives, Abdullah and Hans are only half brothers Ham.

Speaker 7

Abdullah is the son of Queen Luna and Hans is the son of Queen Noor. So Queen Noor was considered to be the favourite wife of King Hussein, and so therefore Hamza is the favourite son.

Speaker 7

Of King Hussein.

Speaker 2

So and do you by any chance also know anything about like the relative status of the Queens within Jordan? Like is queen or for example, a very popular queen?

Speaker 7

Queen, yes, Queen Noor. I'm not really sure about Queen Muna. From what I read in some in like 1 I think biography Queen Queen Luna was decently popular between or was also very popular amongst the Jordanians and I think that was mostly associated with by the time Hussein married. Her Hussein was also very popular in Jordan.

Speaker 7

At that time.

Speaker 7

But generally talking about Queens, Queen Rania is actually very unpopular in Jordan. And whether you know that could be for a lot of reasons.

Speaker 7

Like you said, with westernisation she's also a very big proponent of westernisation. She herself is actually displays into what guy was talking about, is not an east banker, she's.

Speaker 7

Ethnically, a West banker so she has Palestinian heritage. And now she's the Queen of Jordan, which you know for people for East bankers who don't want to see.

Speaker 7

When Jordan becomes second home for the Palestinians. This is sort of something that they don't want to see that there's a.

Speaker 7

They have a queen who you know can trace her, descends descent back to the West.

Speaker 2

Bank yeah and and something you mentioned as well about the court case.

Speaker 2

Is that because it's in a public court, but there is some hope the the court case of Boston model and serial fashion?

Speaker 2

Inside have both been in military courts, which have been highly non transparent and Bosma. Dallas lawyer claimed that Adala has been tortured in order to force him into confession.

Speaker 2

'cause I also think like.

Speaker 2

You know we have been calling it a coup.

Speaker 2

To come throughout the episode, I mean the media is being called a coup as well, but so far there has been extremely little evidence of the coup.

Speaker 2

Basically 'cause the Jordanian intelligence services claimed that, like either someone from his role was involved, there have been a bit of has been a bit of speculation that Saudi Arabia was involved.

Speaker 2

Because of us model, this very close relationship to Mohammed bin Salman and his historical relationship to Saudi Arabia hills.

Speaker 2

He's also a citizen of their country or something, which I guess we can come into now.

Speaker 2

It's like the role or the the role.

Speaker 2

Saudi Arabian money has played.

Speaker 2

In Jordan recently, but it's it does feel like like listening to what you're saying about Hamza's popularity and Abdullah II's relative unpopularity that it's also like a very effective way for him to get rid of a.

Speaker 2

Political opponent 'cause that's that's also something I read when researching this is that's it's. It's not an uncommon idea.

Speaker 7

Allen's

Speaker 2

That you know it's it's more political than anything else.

Speaker 7

Yeah, this this. I think very possibly has like you said, the the ability to get rid of a very popular political opponent to King Abdullah and is sort of something that you know a trend we've seen in the region before. Like with air Dhawan and the coup that occurred in Turkey that.

Speaker 7

Many believe was actually orchestrated by government forces to sort of help Erdogan consolidate power, so it's not unheard of. You know, in the world to stage fake cuz by.

Speaker 7

I restrained myself to call Abdallah and autocrats. I don't think he's a traditional autocrat, but to someone who is sort of like a monarch or a centralised.

Speaker 2

Executive exactly.

Speaker 2

But as I.

Speaker 2

Mentioned earlier, like they're like Saudi Arabian money, and Emirati when he plays a very large role in in Jordan. In 2011 for example.

Speaker 2

The GCC gave a \$5 billion package aid package to two Jordan. Could you go a bit?

Speaker 6

Into that guy, yeah, so so Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries news there, or wealth regionally to make sure that.

Speaker 6

Regional threats as the Arab Spring in 2011 and that kind of protest movement don't spread across their borders and threaten their regimes.

Speaker 6

So in 2011 you had one of the clearest.

Speaker 6

Cases of the.

Speaker 6

Saudi regime using its wealth in that way and it's continued to support Jordan and other states.

Speaker 6

Right, but I think what could have contributed to a bit of confusion or attention or aggravation was the blockade of Qatar in 2017 and onwards, where the Saudis obviously expected to them to take their side because of all the support they've given them. But Jordan, rather than totally.

Speaker 6

Boycotting Qatar instead just downgraded the diplomatic state. It's the same kind of thing happened with Turkey and Qatar. Saudi Arabia asked Turkey cut tyres and Turkey obviously said no way.

Speaker 6

There are friends.

Speaker 6

So I I think that doesn't give a bit of not proof, but if we were going to say if.

Speaker 6

That there was foreign involvement and that it was Saudi. You might look to that tension as a reason for it.

Speaker 6

Rembert's happened with Sadili when that's the previous leader of Lebanon, Mohammed bin Salman and the Saudis felt that he wasn't being.

Speaker 6

On their side enough, considering how much support he was getting from the Saudi government, and so they invited him to Saudi Arabia and roughed him.

Speaker 6

Up a little bit.

Speaker 6

And so perhaps it could be that same kind of thing. The Saudi government just.

Speaker 6

Saying we support you stay in line, but there's there's really no evidence for that. That's entirely speculation and.

Speaker 6

Also in 2020.

Speaker 6

Qatar start an initiative to invest \$500 million in Jordan and provide more jobs in Qatar. So it doesn't seem like if that was the aim doesn't seem like.

Speaker 6

It's worked which.

Speaker 6

Also kind of makes it seem like that isn't what happens and there's a lot of other stuff going on that could point more to an internal if it was a key turning to internal.

Speaker 6

Upset, namely Jordan and the US. His controversial security agreement, and which many people said gave up Jordanian sovereignty in that the US can now carry weapons on its territory, transport supplies and ships and aircraft without applying for a visa. So there's a lot of lots of things going on behind.

Speaker 6

The scenes and also there's a Palestinian dynamic. I suppose you could say in the Jordanian control of hammer shareef, and that's the the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Hammer Sharif is one of the three earliest Muslim shrines along with Macro Medina.

Speaker 6

Jordan is in control of, well, normally in control of herself in Jerusalem. But recently Israelis like echo.net and especially in very more recent.

Speaker 6

Christian Jared Kushner and Donald Trump plan the deal of the century for increased the Middle East and would have seen control of her machine go from the Jordanian king.

Speaker 6

To the Saudis or to other actors, that would be great for the Saudis. The Saudis would love that and they don't have control of three of the religious shrines.

Speaker 6

The most important religious shrines in Islam which would give them a lot more credibility for their claims to represent Islam and be the leaders of the Islamic world. So that would be greatly important for them.

Speaker 6

And also a nightmare for the Jordanians, I think so. King Abdullah was naturally very much against the Kushner and MBS, the American stroke.

Speaker 6

Saudi deal, which is kind of.

Speaker 6

Annoyed, say the least Mohammed bin, Salman and Trump and the Americans, which gives more credence to the idea that it could have been foreign interference to some extent or other forces working in that vein.

Speaker 6

And if there's one quote from John Jenkins who was a former UK consul general to East Jerusalem, and next ambassador to Riyadh, he said that moving of the control of Hamish, surely from Jordan to Saudi, wouldn't have would radically crushed the hash map monarch.

Speaker 6

B and.

Speaker 6

Be like referring a grenade into a crowded room, so naturally the you can see that that the deal of the century wasn't a great deal for Jordan and he wasn't specifically King Abdullah was a massive obstacle to it I guess.

Speaker 2

Yeah no, I I just want to dive a bit more into a few of the things you said because you mentioned or you discussed the financial support from the GCC in 2011 and then from Qatar in 2021. In 2018, the financial support from the Gulf.

Speaker 2

East and massive protests broke out in in Jordan when the government planned to increase taxes to make up for the shortfall and the Jordanians felt this was a quiet.

Speaker 2

A clear punishment by especially the Saudis on STEM for the lack of Jordanian supporting their blockade of Qatar, which you discuss guy and also as you also mentioned, for not giving Saudi Arabia custodianship over Jerusalem because of.

Speaker 2

The associated political and religious and cultural benefits this would have for for Saudi Arabia and UAE and Saudi Arabia eventually did give Jordan \$2 billion, but it is very likely that this money came with a large number of strings attached, for example, to bring Jordan closer into South by the Saudi LED Mirati orbit.

Speaker 2

Or to put pressure on them to support the deal of the centuries. Obviously, is only the deal of the century for the Israelis and for the Saudis. Everybody else gets a.

Speaker 2

Turd sandwich. What is noticeable in general about what we've discussed so far is the fact that Jordan has become a.

Speaker 2

You know it's it's only barely a player in Middle Eastern politics at the moment. It's very much a country that is being almost played with either by the Israelis or by D and.

Speaker 2

Emiratis or by the Saudis because of its, you know, relative lack of economic independence and even how sensitive it is to the politics of the countries around it. It it doesn't have any major domestic industry. It's it's.

Speaker 2

Completely reliance on support from the European Union from the US and from the Gulf and the way they're trying to counteract that drop in legitimacy is, for example, to play a mediating role in in Syria. So King Abdullah II has spoken with Assad posing high up in the.

Speaker 2

Jordanian National Security establishment has met with his counterparts in in Syria and also there's now Egyptian gas and Jordanian electricity being supplied to Lebanon through Syria. So there's.

Speaker 2

Hope or there's intentions within Jordan to you know slowly but surely, or at least attempt to increase their increase their role in the region in order to not be entirely subsumed in the you know the I don't want to say great power, but regional power politics between Israel and and.

Speaker 2

Saudi Arabia and even Iran. Because of you know the anti Iran axis which is developing between the Gulf and Israel.

Speaker 2

And there's also hope, for example, that Israeli Jordanian relations will improve 'cause King Abdullah famously had extremely poor relations with Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been.

Speaker 2

Leading as well for the last decade and you know, I don't think that's surprising. 'cause Netanyahu is not a man who it's easy to have good relationship good relations with.

Speaker 7

So this all like you were saying plays into what I think is the largest obstacle for Jordan regionally, and this has been throughout its entire history, is that it's been accused of being sort of dependent on foreign powers. You know, when Nasser came to power, the greatest assailment that he laid.

Speaker 7

On King Hussein was that he's just a puppet state of the United Kingdom and the US, so I feel like Jordan, throughout its entire history, has been trying to shake off this idea that it's sort of just the safe haven for EU for foreign powers to step into the Middle East. And it's not, you know, the the Western Arab power.

Speaker 7

That a lot of other states see it as. So especially come. I think King Abdullah, like you said.

Speaker 7

With liberalisation but also increased regional engagement and trying to reduce dependence on Western aid and start turning more to Saudi Arabia and the UAE and the GCC which you know you can gauge.

Speaker 7

Whether that's a politically wise move or not has been all in attempt to sort of try and break that standard.

Speaker 7

That Jordan has had with its regional allies.

Speaker 2

And cannot make a cancer argument because.

Speaker 2

For my bachelors thesis and even early on when I hadn't found a topic for my masters thesis yet, I thought I wanted to write a thesis which made the argument that Jordan might be the most important country in the Middle East.

Speaker 2

It's not because of its economic power 'cause it doesn't have any nor its military power. 'cause that's also very limited, but it is a country which is.

Speaker 2

Very much a sponge for all of the problems in the Middle East, like when Iraq basically collapsed under American sanctions in the 90s.

Speaker 2

She's Iraqi refugees went to Jordan when Syria devolved into the civil wars. Now 1.3 million Syrian refugees in Jordan it, and they're all in Jordan, so that and they don't go to Israel.

Speaker 2

They don't go to Saudi Arabia. Don't get Kuwait like Jordan and Lebanon and Turkey are absorbing the vast majority of of refugees in in their region.

Speaker 2

And because it's a very stable country with despite everything we've said a, you know, a stable political leader at least, and a fairly stable political system.

Speaker 2

It's also a country which Israel is probably out of all of them the most comfortable to have as its neighbour. It wouldn't want as big a border with Israel, which is much more belligerent.

Speaker 2

And especially not.

Speaker 2

Syria, with which it's still officially at war.

Speaker 2

So I do think.

Speaker 2

You know, while it is very much a pawn in the region, it is up on which I think each country is desperate to maintain the existence of, because if Jordan would collapse like the, there's also, I feel, at least in my analysis.

Speaker 2

And my knowledge of the region would be fairly cataclysmic, like it would immediately be an existential threat to Israel.

Speaker 2

It would be a massive problem for Syria because suddenly the northern border is potentially very porous when it comes to refugees. Even though there is quite a big.

Speaker 2

Desert and overall, like you know, the problems which Jordan now insulates most of the Middle East from would suddenly become even more regional than they already are.

Speaker 7

Yeah, I would say that's absolutely a fair argument.

Speaker 7

And you know that made me think more. I heard a professor once say that you know the greatest security advantage that the United States has ever had is that.

Speaker 7

It has its two land borders are peaceful and have been historically, so you know, perhaps the same is true for Jordan in the 21st century. You know, with the exception of Syria, maybe, perhaps.

Speaker 7

That plays into it that it has a peaceful border with Saudi Arabia, has a peaceful border with Israel.

Speaker 6

Bill why this time says that Jordan is Jordan is really the best of enemies. I don't wanna go too into it, but I think there's a lot of not out loud, but there's a lot of cooperation under the covers, not least because partly because of their shared history, they both had a shared enemy in Palestinian nationalism, but also.

Speaker 6

Because Jordan is very water scarce country water resource gets in general and.

Speaker 6

Israel is less so I think Jordan, even though of course in 2021 when you had the outbreak of vines, they publicly condemned Israel.

Speaker 6

There weren't actually actions to back up those words because Jordan is quite dependent on Israel for its water and other energy needs. And also I think there's a lot of security cooperation.

Speaker 6

As we said before, it's it's the aid that I received from the US. Make sure that it.

Speaker 6

Aligns itself with Israel.

Speaker 6

As well, if not on a rhetoric public level.

Speaker 2

And I I once a few years ago, I spoke with the Israeli ambassador to the Netherlands and I asked him a similar question and he gave a very short answer.

Speaker 2

And that's why I still remember it, and his answer was that Jordanian and Israeli interests are very closely aligned. And that's all he said. Even though I asked him quite a long question.

Speaker 2

But he clearly didn't want to go into too much, but it does seem to be the case that you know, despite a vast amount of potentially quite hostile rhetoric across the border, both countries realise they do need each other because they had Jordan and Lebanon. For example, swap places like.

Speaker 2

The situation in Israel would have been quite difficult to handle, to say the least.

Speaker 6

I had something cool about plans for a high for railway port. I've been airport, but we connect for railway which would become part of Israel making friends with the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Speaker 6

So obviously if it wants to become connected regionally economically that way, then a railway would necessarily have to go through a man.

Speaker 6

Through it all, so it would necessarily need Jordan cooperation to become integrated in the regional economic market.

Speaker 6

Which could mean that Jordan remains somewhat of a geopolitical power.

Speaker 7

I thought think about what obvious Lime says about them being the best of enemies. I remember when I was in Jordan in this would have been in this incident occurred in November of 2019. I just returned from Palestine on the West of the Palestinian West Bank.

Speaker 7

It's back to him and I was reading the English newspaper The Jordan Times and it was.

Speaker 7

Like 2 days later.

Speaker 7

King Abdullah did not renew Israel lease on two regions. I'm a I'm in level one Arabic, so let me go ahead and butcher the names of the places Bakura and Al Hamir, which were places that Israel was sort of leasing from the Jordanian government. And then when the lease was do, Israel was fully expecting Jordan to renew them.

Speaker 7

And they did not. So yeah there are. You know shots across the bow, but I think guy what you said is is sound that they they sort of need each other Israel for security purposes. Jordan for you know resource purposes from Israel so.

Speaker 7

But Jordan also does things to sort of retain its legitimacy. As you know, part of the Arab world and support for the Palestinians.

Speaker 2

I, I think that Jordan isn't a quite interesting situation and this might be how we in the podcast.

Speaker 2

Where it is.

Speaker 2

Probably one of the very few countries in the world where almost all the stakeholders with in it.

Speaker 2

And outside of it want to situation in Jordan to be as good as possible. You know you don't see that, for example, with Yemen or with Syria. 'cause then there's too many vested interests which are perfectly comfortable.

Speaker 2

Ripping the country apart, but it does seem that the Gulf Arabs, the Americans, Europeans, the Israelis are all very invested in ensuring that the situation in Jordan, like the political problems we've discussed, the economic problems we've discussed, and the tensions worth the country's national identity that all of them get resolved in a positive way.

Speaker 2

Simply because the the alternative would be a disaster.

Speaker 2

Thank you for listening to this episode of Alamak. The Oxford Middle East podcast.

Speaker 2

Alamanac is a student run initiative at the Middle East Centre in the University of Oxford. The opinions expressed in the podcast did not in any way represent the official opinions of the University of the Middle East Centre.