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A Nation-Building Analysis of Jordan's Response to Pandemic with the Perspective of Political Integration

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the approach of political integration behind the decision-making made by the Jordanian government in response to the threat of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Although Jordan is a developing MENA country that has relatively controlled the spread of the epidemic, especially in the first half of 2020, through 2020, to fight COVID-19, the Jordanian government was generally reluctant to give up nation-building that could contribute to political integration. Those specific policies to fight the pandemic are not only for 'knee-hopping' to responding to short-term suppression of public health security threats, but to smoothly maintain the existing political system, conveying comprehensive political culture, coping with external expectations, and balancing domestic forces in particular between ethnic groups, so as to achieve political integration required by a solid nation state.

KEYWORDS

Political Integration; COVID-19; nation-building; Jordan; solidarity

Introduction

The covid-19 pandemic has devastated the global economy, raising the possibility of a dramatic turning to globalisation which seems widely accepted and continued throughout this century. The chaos and rampage caused by the epidemic has forced the global system and almost all countries in it, to respond effectively and efficiently to prevent and control disease spread. Sadly, covid-19 continues to spread and even mutate and has ruined most festivals and holidays that should bring family and friends together. No country is immune to this tragedy regardless of the stage of development. The dilemma faced by governments is even greater for countries with an incomplete national industrial structure, poorly developed industrial chains and an economy that is extremely dependent on external capital inputs. This paper focuses on one such country: Jordan.

While the global fight against the new virus has generally demonstrated a spirit of solidarity and cooperation beyond moral concern, it has also revealed the structural differences in the international system implicit in the strengths and weaknesses of the national governance capacities of countries at different stages of development.

Sudden public health security threats would place demands on countries for national capacity to be able to respond to crises in a timely manner. If one state's corresponding governance capacity is inadequate, public health security issues may spill over into broader areas of security crises, including political security. Optimistically, as long as the regime is able to weather the public health security threats with relative stability, the governance capacity would be enhanced by crisis management experience. In other words, the state gains passive momentum of political development as a result of the epidemic.

The virus is wreaking havoc around the world. Countries' response attitudes and initiatives to win a war against the epidemic are not only determined by their level of economic development, but are also closely influenced by their level of political development. A certain country's political system, historical legacy, ethnic structures and global pressures it has to face are the basis for rational governments' judgments involving urgent decision-making. In other words, in the longer term, it is the very factors that shape and strengthen nation-building¹ that could sway those strategic choices governments made in response to the pandemic.

To illustrate the logic of political integration that underpins fighting the novel coronavirus decision-making choices made by middle-income countries, this paper takes the case of Jordan, a lower middle-income country in MENA that is managing the spread of the epidemic relatively during the first half of 2020. Despite being a country heavily dependent on external aid, expatriate remittance and foreign investment, Jordan hastily reopened its borders after pulling back the curve and since then the epidemic has intensified within the country, as with its neighbours. Some of Jordan's neighbouring countries are still struggling with internal disorder, yet Jordan is a relatively peaceful and stable country in MENA. Different from the absolute monarchies and authoritarian regimes, Jordan is comparatively more modern, open and secular. However, Jordan does not have the natural resources such as oil or gas to benefit from an energy economy as the Gulf countries do, and suffering from its weak industrial base, it cannot be identified as a wealthy, thriving country.

In Jordan, as of 27 January, a total of 322,241 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed with 4248 deaths.² It is recognised by most Jordanian citizens that Jordan's early lockdown³ in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 has made the epidemic controllable during the first wave, and even could be called a success.⁴ Through looking back at the first season of Jordan's quarantine decisions for combating epidemic related political issues, it is clear from the perspective of political development that the Jordanian government's specific decisions were not merely a short-term attempt to minimise imminent public health safety threats, but were also a combination of potential functions of maintaining the existing political system. Those measures put

¹A. Wimmer, *Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 176–178.

²World Health Organization, 'Data table of Jordan', (27 January 2021), available at: <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/jo>.

³K. Hartman, 'How Jordan's COVID-19 lockdown compares to US response', WCPO, (25 March 2020), available at: <https://www.wcpo.com/news/coronavirus/how-jordans-covid-19-lockdown-compares-to-u-s-response>.

⁴T. Luck, 'Jordan Announces Sweeping New Measures to Combat Coronavirus', *The National*, (17 March 2020), available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/jordan-announces-sweeping-new-measures-to-combat-coronavirus-1.993768>.

into action by the government are reflections of the country's political culture, responding to external expectations and balancing power relations between communities and groups in the country, in order to achieve the political integration required for nation building.

Response to the Epidemic in Tandem with Slow Reform of the Political System

Political scientists assume that the chance of political change lies in the political ideological-institutional mismatch.⁵ Studies that support a complex analytical path to explain the friction between ideas and political order that breed political action that triggers political change use economic policy innovation in European countries⁶ and the policy prohibiting racial inequality in the United States⁷ to demonstrate that disjointed institutional political order and ideational political order drives the political development process forward. Besides serious public health emergency, public policy adjustments in low-income countries suffer from tensions between political ideas, political cultures and institutional order, and also occur within the constraints of historical and institutional circumstances. Since the Arab Spring, democratisation was once the trend. A decade of upheaval in the Middle East combined political change with various interest struggles between multiple forces. The friction between society perceptions and institutional structure in Jordan is at a crossroads between the growing political perceptions of the non-elite for civil rights to improve people's livelihoods and the maintenance of the pre-existing political order with a core claim of strong royalty and tribal stability.

Jordan is a hereditary constitutional monarchy and named after the Hashemite royal family country. King Abdullah II has very broad and centralised powers. As the supreme leader of the country, the King holds the highest levels of executive, military and legislative authority. Before the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the Prime Minister of Jordan was appointed directly by the King. It is not rare to frequently replace the Prime Minister and reshuffle the cabinet in response to serious crises. Although in a constitutional sense, Jordan has a parliamentary cabinet system, Jordan's de facto political system contains both democratic elements and centralisation. The parliament of Jordan is multi-party, but political parties' powers are weak. The cabinet of Jordan is non-partisan. Party politics is underdeveloped in the country. The constitution of Jordan has been amended several times, and the most recent amendment began in 2011. There is a discrepancy between the principle of 'sovereignty of people' consolidated constitution and its factual implementation in Jordan.⁸ The progress of political

⁵R. Lieberman, 'Ideas, institutions, and political order: explaining political change', *The American Political Science Review* 96(4), (2020), p. 700.

⁶P. Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1986); K. McNamara, *The Politics of Everyday Europe: Construction Authority in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷E. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); J. Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); L. Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

⁸M. Bani Salameh, 'Political reform in Jordan: reality and aspirations', *World Affairs* 180(4), (2017), pp. 47–78.

reform has been slow since then. Overseas observers believe that the Jordanian government, which had previously faced a serious crisis of confidence among the major population, has been given an excellent opportunity to ease the pressure for transparency benefit from the sudden epidemic.⁹ Jordanian media and public opinion used to spotlight corruption, but now the public health emergency media coverage of then Prime Minister Omar Razzaz and his cabinet's epidemic prevention and control measures dominates. To some extent, increased information sharing to fight against the pandemic has also objectively increased government transparency.

Uninterrupted but Slow Democratisation Process

Most Western scholars of comparative politics and political development theory believe that democracy is the most effective system for nation building.¹⁰ In explaining US policy towards the Middle East, some scholars argue that 'democratisation' can even be equated with 'nation-building'.¹¹ A reformed political system conducive to nation-building requires political leaders who are politically inclusive and able to reach out to the masses beyond the confines of certain ethnic groups. Political modernisation requires that administration addresses accommodate the interests of as many groups as possible and avoid exclusivity.¹² Since the end of 2010, most MENA countries have faced recurring social movements. People have repeatedly taken to the streets to demonstrate their grievances. These social movements are attempts by those disenfranchised to gain more political and economic rights.

The Jordanian polity suffers from some endogenous identity politics divisions.¹³ To some extent, historically, the Jordanian government once used the identity politics card to promote regime rule. But for a modern state, without a national identity that can be widely shared and that contributes to social integration, the country is always in danger of fragmentation.

In the context of Jordan's political reforms and democratisation process, the most pertinent popular demands on the executive branch are the criticism of the government's lack of transparency and the demand for punishing corruption, which undermines the country's economic development. As a result, the government has frequently changed prime ministers, and the prime minister has frequently reshuffled his cabinet. On the surface, the political elite is responding to the demands of domestic social movements, but it should be said that the change of specific political elites in the crucial executive department has not really solved the country's deep-rooted political problems. Prior to the pandemic, Jordanians' trust in the government

⁹J. Arraf, 'Jordan keeps coronavirus in check with one of the world's strictest lockdowns', NPR, (25 March 2020), available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/>.

¹⁰L. Diamond, 'Rethinking civil society: toward democratic consolidation', *Journal of Democracy* 5(3), (1994), pp. 4-17; S. Huntington, 'Democracy for the long haul', *Journal of Democracy* 7(2), (1996), pp. 3-13.

¹¹J. Dobbins, 'American's role in nation-building: from Germany to Iraq', *Survival* 45(4), (2003), pp. 87-110.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³M. Bani Salameh and K. El-Edwan, 'The identity crisis in Jordan: historical pathways and contemporary debates', *Nationalities Paper* 44(6), (2016), p. 985.

continued to decline, according to the International Republican Institute¹⁴ and the Arab Barometer¹⁵ reports. The general public believes that corruption is widespread among state institutions, especially among cabinet ministers.

The global pandemic gave Jordan an unexpected opportunity to rebuild trust between the ruling government and its citizens, although this relationship of trust proved to be fragile as the epidemic repeated. At least during the first wave of the epidemic, there were sparkling flashes of mutual trust and cooperation between government and society. As vaccination efforts move forward, it is possible that reconciliation can be promoted again.

When retracing back to early 2020, in the first period of the pandemic, Jordan had panic attacks, which were common all over the world. During that time, there were lapses in command that prevented the rapid delivery of epidemic supplies, supermarket goods being snapped up in the hours before the city was closed, poor cooperation with curfew orders, and accidents like bread delivery trucks unable to enter the city despite the start of the blockade. The initial ill-considered initiatives to combat the epidemic were a reflection of the Jordanian government's long-standing weaknesses in governance. But the Jordanian government soon demonstrated impressive mobilisation capacity. Ministers of health, national security, information, transport and other relevant ministries were able to quickly adapt the policy details according to subsequent problems, correcting errors and omissions, and announcing them in real time through both new and traditional media platforms. With nationwide lockdown amid virus surge, open and effective policy helped to contain the spread of the epidemic in Jordan and to stabilise the initial lack of understanding. It is undeniable that other countries around the world also experienced confusion and panic in the early stages of the epidemic, Jordan's achievement was due to the small size of the country and the relatively stable security environment.

With the normalisation and prolongation of the epidemic, public concern about government corruption will gradually return. Citizens are concerned about their health and well-being, but also about the lack of economic growth and unemployment problem. Media were concerned that the failure to eradicate corruption would undermine the effectiveness of fighting the pandemic. Despite that the King made a statement that there was no waste or fraud in the fight against the epidemic, it was soon reported that the Minister of Agriculture had resigned over his involvement in corruption over the distribution of licences during the curfew.¹⁶ It was in response to these concerns that, upon taking office in October 2020, the new Prime Minister, Bisher Al-Khasawneh, a former diplomat, immediately promised that the current government would be an open government and that the information provided to the media would be comprehensive and accurate.

The ministers' resignations amounted in part to a repetition of the usual pattern of failed political reforms in Jordan. By putting ministers in charge of responding to the

¹⁴International Republican Institute, 'New poll: Jordanians remain frustrated with the economy and government,' (31 March 2020), available at: <https://www.iri.org/resource/new-poll-jordanians-remain-frustrated-economy-and-government>.

¹⁵Arab Barometer, 'Joran Country Report', (2019), available at: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/>.

¹⁶M. Al-Arsan, 'Mobility permits' are behind the resignation of the Minister of Agriculture', Ammanet, (2 April 2020).

epidemic, Jordanian leaders have also retained a response that blames failures on these individuals, rather than acknowledging systemic problem and unlikely to touch on a rethink of centralised royal rule. More notably, the Jordanian government has pledged not to 'politicise' the epidemic to shift the crisis of rule, and to hold parliamentary elections, possibly online¹⁷ to ensure that the country's democratisation continues. The general parliamentary election did take place in November 2020 with a surge in COVID-19 cases, although no alternative in-person voting method offered.

Economic Recovery Decisions Based on Existing Economic Structure

Under the pressure of the pandemic, Jordan's initiatives to improve the country's economic situation have been generally conservative. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a general crisis in the public finances and health systems of every country. The epidemic has hit the Jordanian national healthcare system and has also dealt a huge blow to the country's public finance system. Jordan's public debt is growing at an alarming rate. According to a Jordanian Ministry of Finance announcement, foreign grants to Jordan for the 10 months of 2020 amounted to JOD 705.8 million, compared to JOD 207.3 million in the same period last year. Government public debt (excluding the Social Security Investment Fund) stood at 82.3% of GDP at the end of October, compared to 75.8% of GDP last year.¹⁸ Public debt distress is a bit better than estimated in early 2020 due to increased international assistance.

Jordan is a small country with few natural resources other than potash, and does not have the advantage of an energy economy such as oil and gas, yet the economy did not crash as hard as oil-producing countries by the falling oil prices since the coronavirus outbreak.

The problem with the Jordanian economic structure is primarily that it is weak with a low level of economic development. Even without the coronavirus epidemic destroying the economy, Jordan's economic situation had previously been bleak. In recent years, Jordanian official economic development plan, expatriate remittances, foreign aid and revenue from tourism are the three main pillars of the country's economy and government's primary budget sources. Unfortunately, all three revenues are heavily dependent on external factors. The Jordanian economy is a typical contemporary dependency economy. This vulnerable economic structural bias has generated the persistent instability of Jordan's economic development.

The IMF invariably impose onerous political-economic-financial structural reform requirements when lending to MENA countries, including Jordan. However, it was common for recipient countries to simply reduce public spending in the form of cutting food subsidies, education subsidies, pension subsidies and other so-called reforms, rather than actually implementing either economic or political structural reforms. Cuts in subsidies at the livelihood level can quickly stir up popular discontent with government economic policies. It is, of course, worth clarifying that the Jordanian people's demands in their protests were for the advancement of ameliorative policies

¹⁷L. Atoum, 'COVID-19 dynamic', The Jordan Times, (31 May 2020), available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/lara-ali-atoum/covid-19-dynamic>.

¹⁸Data sources: 'The Ministry of Finance (Jordan)', available at: <https://mof.gov.jo/en-us/mainpage.aspx>.

that do not harm people's livelihoods, rather than fundamental reforms to the economic and financial structure. The apparent flurry of demonstrations and protests is not at all a political revolution to overthrow the existing political system in Jordan.

The epidemic exacerbated the instability of the Jordanian economy. When the height of the concentration and severity of the epidemic came, the Jordanian government declared mandatory physical evacuation as the crux of its epidemic prevention efforts. The government maintained a high intensity policy of lockdown and quarantine, while increasing security investment across the country. The extremely strict closure policy resulted in huge economic losses and a surge in unemployment in the hotel, restaurant and other business associated with Jordan's tourist industry. By the time June 2020 rolled around, the epidemic was heading towards normality. In order to resume work and production as soon as possible, the Jordanian government had to boost the country's economy. Unfortunately, the decision of reopening the country prematurely led to the subsequent return spread of coronavirus. The then Prime Minister Omar Razzaz announced that the tourist industry would be protected by a large grant, allowing for the payment of income tax in instalments, a reduction in sales tax and service charges, to even ban the dismissal of tourism workers. However, with the deterioration of the economic situation and the resignation of Razzaz himself, many of those ideas could not be implemented.

Other industries in Jordan have also fallen into a development slump due to the impact of the epidemic. Take real estate as an example, the Department of Land and Surveys statistics for only the first two months of 2020 show a 16% year-on-year decline in Jordanian real estate transactions and a 34% drop in real estate revenues. Due to the downturn in the real estate market during the epidemic, land prices have continued to fall and real estate profits have fallen as well.¹⁹ In fact, the Jordanian real estate market was already suffering from declining profits before the epidemic.²⁰

Practitioners are looking to the state for a government bailout, hoping for policies to simplify the real estate approval process and for the government to bring in more investors into the Jordanian real estate market. Regrettably, the Jordanian construction industry is reliant on migrant labour, while the economic pressures and potential health emergency and safety risks wrapped with pandemic have increased the cost of employing expatriate labour. The pandemic has triggered waves of repatriation, at the same time as a significant reduction in the remittances that Jordanian expatriates could provide.

In contrast to the economic downturn, and precisely because of Jordan's unstable economic structure and lack of economic autonomy, the Jordanian government and enterprises have adapted to and welcomed new technologies. They have become even more hopeful that they will enhance the economy depending on new technologies. Jordan's largest English-language newspaper, the *Jordan Times*, for example, published several commentaries calling for global cooperation in information and communications technology. One of those commentaries specifically mentioned the

¹⁹Department of Land & Survey, 'Real estate indicator', available at: <http://www.dls.gov.jo/en/Pages/Real-EstateIndicators.aspx>.

²⁰L. Delmendo, 'Jordan's housing market still struggling', Global Property Guide, (8 August 2019), available at: <https://www.globalpropertyguide.com/Middle-East/Jordan>.

cooperation between the Chinese company Huawei and Jordan's digital economy and education department, and also highlights that 5G networks will provide a powerful technological tool in the fight against the epidemic.²¹

The Effectiveness of Anti-epidemic Endeavour: A New Factor Shaping Political Reform

In terms of predictions of the future, political sociologist Richard Lachmann argues that ecological catastrophes can overwhelm the nation if national capacity is not strong enough. As the development trajectory of that nation is freed from external influences, national policy and governance capacity will only be further determined by elites and the structure of class relations.²² On the other hand, since the second half of the last century, countries that have retained their traditional powerful monarchies have faced a modernisation dilemma in the sense of political institution.²³ These countries have found that the centralisation of power in the monarchy to push for sweeping reforms in the process of political modernisation creates a conflict of power with the need to expand and absorb those new social groups that emerge from social and economic modernisation. In short, it was a conflict between traditional and modern authoritarianism. Previously, the reality behind political reform in Jordan was that the government, mainly the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, had taken on almost all the pressure of protest, without any real impact on the King's own power.

Prior to the pandemic, since the Arab Spring, disillusionment with the government has been normal in Jordan. In Jordan's successive popular demonstrations, the marchers have often raised a range of political demands such as constitutional reform, the overthrow of a corrupt government, the dissolution of parliament and opposition to tax hikes.²⁴ The Jordanian government has been overwhelmed. Following the ideal path of democratisation, the direction of political reform in Jordan should have been to promote parliamentary rule and reduce the power of the King. But the new 2016 constitution has objectively strengthened the king's power instead.²⁵ However, during the epidemic, especially compared to other MENA countries, Jordan's proactive, timely and thorough measures to control the epidemic have been effective. This optimism continued until the second wave of the outbreak arrived. At least in the early stage, most Jordanians endorsed the strong mobilisation and rapid response of the government and as a result grew in self-confidence towards their country.²⁶ A poll conducted by the Centre for Strategic Studies in the University of Jordan on 18 May showed that 77% of respondents believed that the government was capable of handling the crisis

²¹F. Tao, 'Putting technology at the forefront of Jordan's COVID-19 fight', *The Jordan Times*, (13 June 2020), available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/taofeike/putting-technology-forefront-jordans-covid-19-fight>.

²²R. Lachmann, *States and Power* (Cambridge Malden: Polity, 2010), p. 162.

²³S. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (Hew Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 181.

²⁴R. Omari, 'Dozens protest income tax law, economic policies near Prime Ministry', *The Jordan Times*, (2 December 2018), available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/dozens-protest-income-tax-law-economic-policies-near-prime-ministry>.

²⁵A. Younes, 'Jordan changes constitution to give King more power', *Al Jazeera*, (28 April 2016), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/4/28/jordan-changes-constitution-to-give-king-more-power>.

²⁶M. Al-Abbadi, 'Fighting COVID-19: Jordan as a role model', *The Jordan Times*, (31 May 2020), available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/mousa-al-abbadi/fighting-covid-19-jordan-role-model>.

and 79% were satisfied with the government's measures to prevent and control the epidemic.²⁷ Theories that study state construction suggest that a large number of normative and cognitive expectations pattern models an orderly complex that facilitates social activities which meet the requirements of society.²⁸ Popular confidence certainly provides a benign consensus that the government will advance a developmental nation.

Voices of caution and criticism remain. For example, government regulation of information has sparked controversy over freedom of expression. Since February 2020, the Jordanian government has continued to use the response to the virus as an opportunity to convey a strong determination by unified decree. To this end, the government has continued to increase its information controls on the grounds of curbing the spread of fake news on the internet. This move is tantamount to empowering the government to more severely restrict the measure of public criticism, which had been a loosened political phenomenon since 2011. The previous controversy over freedom of expression would gradually continue to fester as long as the severity of the epidemic declined.

The Origins of Political Culture and Dependencies: The Historical Heritage Embodied in the Fight Against the Epidemic

To explore the prospects of nation-building, it is improper to ignore the historical legacy of imperialism, for emerging countries' national political cultures are always gradual mingling with influences made by external big powers. In the post-colonial era, the overlap between minorities and the elite in the formerly colonised countries has been integrated into the explanatory framework of the subsequent political modernisation process. The dilemma of configuration of powers in a nascent nation is the historical legacy of the colonial era. The once-colonial, imperialist powers brought to the controlled territories a style of political domination that was inimical to their own. This parallel existence of ideas that both recognise the political and cultural ideology of past empires, and have a certain obligation to support the new nation to this day, together form the historical legacy that influences low-income countries' nation-building.

As is happening all over the world, humanitarian-style pictures of Jordan arising from governmental measures to control the epidemic are often impressive. Through the media, one can see images and videos of families flocking to local supermarkets to buy and stock up on household items, queues at wide social distances in front of shops, soldiers and quarantine centres, and so on. These scenes reinforce the government's capacity of mobilisation to control the fatality rate. The changes are likely to have a profound and long-term impact on social cohesion and national capacity. In retrospect, Jordan's early statehood was characterised by internal cooperation between tribes, Faisal nationalism and external competition between nationalism and

²⁷M. Weldali, 'Majority express satisfaction with handling of coronavirus crisis - CSS poll', *The Jordan Times*, (19 May 2020), available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/majority-express-satisfaction-handling-coronavirus-crisis-%E2%80%93-css-poll>; Center for Strategic Studies, 'Jordanian indicator polls series', (5 February 2020), available at: <http://jcss.org/ShowNews.aspx?NewsId=812>.

²⁸G. Poggi, *The State: Its Nature, Development and Prospects* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 88.

British colonial power. In all, Jordanian nation-building relied heavily on external national capacity building, that is to say, British control. Contemporary Jordan retains both its unique binational ties with Britain and the very high leadership position of the King, and has actively chosen an overall secular way of social life based on respect for religious traditions. This led to difficulties in Jordan in separating the power of the king from the power of the state, including the government, as it continues in the process of democratisation, and also in the fight against the spread of coronavirus.

A Special Relationship with Britain

The establishment of Jordan as a nation in the modern sense is closely linked to Britain. Before becoming a modern nation state, the people living on the land of today's Jordan lived a tribal lifestyle as their basic livelihood. Before the First World War, the Hashemite family hoped to gain the support of an external power, Britain, to establish an independent Arab state. After the First World War, Britain occupied and administered the Jordanian region directly in the form of a Mandate of Trusteeship. The British Mandate did not end when Transjordan became an independent state, and Britain controlled Jordanian government spending and agenda setting, inhibiting the growth of tribal power. For a considerable period of time, Jordan was not a fully independent and sovereign state.

The British ended the Mandate, recognised Transjordan's independence and granted financial subsidies to Jordan, which amounted to a series of military and diplomatic privileges, only after the signing of the Treaty of Alliance in the late 1940s, when Jordan allowed a British military presence. After the withdrawal of all British troops, Britain remained the main economic and military aid donor to Jordan. Jordan is one of the few Arab countries in the Middle East with which Britain, the United States and Israel all have friendly, if not close, relations. Of course, it is also due to the international political shake-up brought about by the pandemic that the year 2020 has seen a notable tableau of diplomatic relations among Middle Eastern countries. Since the Biden administration is likely to hold a different Middle East strategy compared with the Trump administration, relations between Arab countries and Israel are still in a state of uncertainty.

The UK's historical ties with Jordan are also reflected in the cross-border cooperation and financial assistance during the outbreak. For example, on 4 June the King of Jordan responded positively to and participated in the Global Vaccine Summit online conference convened at the initiative of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.²⁹ The summit was attended by 25 heads of state or government, the UN Secretary-General and the WHO Director-General, as well as other dignitaries. Between early May and June, UK pledged more than £30 million to countries in the Middle East to provide medical equipment for the critically ill and train health care workers to help fight the

²⁹King Abdullah II Official Website, 'Remarks by His Majesty King Abdullah II at the Global Vaccine Summit', (4 June 2020), available at: <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/global-vaccine-summit>.

epidemic in Iraq, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as to mitigate the impact of the epidemic for vulnerable groups in Yemen.³⁰

As the vaccine program developed, the WHO has repeatedly warned against 'vaccine nationalism', emphasising that only mass vaccination can end the pandemic. Wealthy countries should not exacerbate international inequalities in vaccine supplies. Jordan does not have the capacity to develop vaccines on its own and calls for international aid. Until vaccine production problems in wealthy countries are solved, Jordan's vaccine supplies would be limited.

In the specific area of public administration, the UK's impact on Jordan has been extended to civil servants in the general public sector. For example, 'Support for Improvement in Government and Management' (SIGMA) a joint initiative of the OECD and the EU, provides public training to help civil servants return to work in Jordan. On 12 May, the then Prime Minister Razzaz distributed a work manual to government agencies sponsored by SIGMA.³¹ The Jordanian Government used this practical guide as a model for online training focussed on civil servants in human resources, administration and communications public institutions.

Image of the King, Image of the Government and Image of the Nation

Unlike Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which are relatively oil-rich in their surroundings, Jordan is constrained by its geography and natural resources, and its regional political status takes precedence over its economic status. Jordan's King Abdullah II has a very positive diplomatic image in the international community and has relatively good relations with government dignitaries around the world, and since 2011 it has been the King who has led the country's limited reforms in Jordanian media reports. During this period, popular discontent with the king and the royal family has been occasionally reported, but not serious enough to undermine the foundation of his reign. The epidemic prevention and control efforts have not only enhanced the image of the government, as elaborated earlier in this paper, but also the prestige of the King of Jordan. The King has been diligent in reaching out to the mainstream media in various countries. Some of the policies were announced by the King himself to the outside world.

In an interview with the Western media in mid-April, the King described how, given that Jordan had levelled the prevention and control curve, he was about to start a phased return to work, jobs and classes, and that restrictions on public activities would be gradually lifted. In the process of his COVID-19 response, the King recognised China's achievements and in a public interview with the New York Times mentioned that the kits donated by Jack Ma had multiplied Jordan's testing capacity, and frankly thanked him for donating epidemic prevention materials to Jordan.³²

In contrast to the largely positive image of the King, Jordanians have a much more complicated feeling about the image of the government. The Jordanian government's

³⁰UK Government, 'UK aid supporting the fight against coronavirus in the Middle East', (23 May 2020), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-supporting-the-fight-against-coronavirus-in-the-middle-east>.

³¹SIGMA OECD, 'Jordan and SIGMA', available at: <http://www.sigmaxweb.org/countries/jordan-sigma.htm>.

³²Ibid.

anti-epidemic initiatives are more stringent than those of neighbouring countries. Jordan issued an entry control order on February 2, being one of the first countries to stop the entry of travellers on a Chinese passport, and the Ministry of Agriculture suspended the import of Chinese animal and plant products from February 2.³³ The governors of the interior, health, press, food, pharmaceuticals, security forces and other departments linked to the prevention of the epidemic held frequent press conferences, presenting a positive image of openness and transparency of information.

An overview of the Jordanian national media reveals the press campaign strategy of the Razzaz cabinet: ministers hold routine press conferences almost daily, using the government's social media channels to disseminate their policies or responses. Ministers in crucial departments appeared in the public scene much more frequently than ever before.

Jordanians have largely accepted and cooperated with the government's ongoing and revised initiatives to control epidemic. Given the devastation of the coronavirus in every aspect of daily life, interviews showed that people who had never listened to and followed government statements and policies so carefully, let alone followed them quickly, listened carefully to the government's wealth of announcements and were highly compliant with them, with the supervision of the police and military forces. The Jordanian government was being questioned for its unwillingness to address systemic corruption and economic inequality, the general public opinion for once had given the King and the Razzaz cabinet a great deal of respite. On the positive side, the Jordanian public has, for the first time in almost a decade, not been overwhelmed by negative feelings of distress, but has instead recognised the current government's ability to manage the crisis for a certain period of time. Ideally, this turnaround in image has even benefitted the social feedback on government policies beyond the epidemic policy. Unfortunately, the virus was not reined in and the global recession is deepening.

Jordan's epidemic prevention initiatives have created an image of the country that should be praised in comparison to its neighbours. Some argue that it is nationalistic to receive praise in comparison to countries with worse political performance,³⁴ the sustainability of such praise must be highly dependent on Jordan's ability to effectively contain the epidemic and deal with a later surge. In the event of a collapse or recurrence of the epidemic, there is no certainty that allows Jordanians persistence in believing the government.

After all, the legitimacy of a regime and the effectiveness of its policies can only be guaranteed if the public believes that a government is competent and that it will respond effectively to popular criticism. In the context of the pandemic, with citizens fully engaged in government policy, with unprecedented public scrutiny, there is a great need for the Jordanian government to maintain the transparency demonstrated in the outbreak communications.

³³Economic and Commercial office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 'Jordan imposes entry restrictions on Chinese passport holders', (4 February 2020), available at: <http://jo.mofcom.gov.cn/article/wb/202002/20200202933678.shtml>.

³⁴Ibid.

The ability of the leadership to deal directly with the corruption and favouritism that has occurred and may occur, to punish the wrongdoers, and to target and correct the institutional design of the established political system that fosters corruption in the longer term, will be crucial to the future integration of the popular that needed for nation building.

Religious Life in a Secularised Nation

The uniqueness of the relationship between religion and politics in Jordan lies in the fact that one of the most important sources of legitimacy for royal rule is the Holy Family in the religious sense, and Islam is the state religion of Jordan. However, Jordan is also one of the most secularised countries in the Middle East. From a geo-political point of view, Jordan is on the front line of the Arab-Israeli conflict and is a country neighbouring religious extremist and religious terrorist forces. The complex external religious environment has made Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID) highly experienced at counter-terrorism services. As a result, even in 2014–2017, only 12%³⁵ of Jordanians consider ISIS and religious extremism to be the most serious concern.

To prevent terrorists from taking advantage of the epidemic to infiltrate Jordanian territory, Jordan has stepped up group surveillance during the epidemic.³⁶ Jordanian religious culture, which values Islam and respects other religions, is not conservative. It has led to two important policy orientations in relation to the need for epidemic prevention: on the one hand, epidemic prevention policies necessarily cover religious life, and on the other hand, a very strict closure and isolation policy in relation to religious sites and religious life could be approve.

Jordan reopened its mosques on 5 June and restricted their opening to prayer times only, with no air conditioning or fans allowed during open use. All mosques require entrants to wear masks, gloves, keep a safe distance and bring their own prayer mats. But since then, the Jordanian government has re-closed religious sites several times, depending on the changes in the epidemic. According to local Jordanian media the robust Ramadan consumer market of previous years was offset this year by the strict curfew for the coronavirus. Jordanians complimented themselves as the reflection of highest values of solidarity.³⁷

International Aid for the Pandemic and Global Multiculturalism

The forces that shape the political shape of a country come not only from the internal political system and domestic historical legacy of the country, but they are also influenced by global forces. The King of Jordan published an opinion insisting on

³⁵Jordan: extremism & counter-extremism', The Counter Extremism Project, (2020), available at: [https:// www. counterextremism.com/countries/jordan](https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/jordan).

³⁶M. Al-Abbadi, 'Fighting Covid-19: Jordan as a role model'.

³⁷The Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Washington, D.C., 'Razzaz commends Jordanian solidarity, reviews social protection measures during pandemic', The Jordan Times, (13 May 2020), available at: [http:// jordanembassyus.org/news/razzaz-commends-jordanian-solidarity-reviews-social-protection-measures-during-pandemic](http://jordanembassyus.org/news/razzaz-commends-jordanian-solidarity-reviews-social-protection-measures-during-pandemic).

globalisation in the *Washington Post*, entitled 'It's Times to Return to Globalisation but This Time Let's do it Right'. The article called for the breaking down of barriers between countries, not the rebuilding of them. It explained that a 're-globalisation' means a better globalisation, and a new world based on a more precise strengthening of cooperation between countries in the post-epidemic era.³⁸ At a time of growing rethinking of de-globalisation among richer countries, the King of Jordan's assertion of the importance of globalisation is a form of moral solidarity with those who support the continuation of global cooperation.³⁹

The Arab States stand out for having much lower average prices per GB for computer-based plans than for handset-based plans. Such a difference is explained by the large data allowances included in computer-based mobile-broadband plans in Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which allow operators in these countries to offer significant volume discounts to their customers. On the other hand, smaller data allowances coupled with relatively high prices for handset-based mobile-broadband plans drive the price per GB above PPP\$40 in Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

When the epidemic crisis hit, developed countries were thinking about restructuring their industrial chains and focussing on their security. The King of Jordan's article represents the apprehension of low-income countries. After all, for countries with lagging economic levels, even if the ruler has a global reputation but no economic development that benefits the population to support the non-productive political elite, the challenge of political integration in the process of nation-building will remain in the long run.

International Organisations' Humanitarian Aid and the Spirit of Cooperation

The upsurge in deglobalisation has ruined mutual trust among countries. In a climate of frustration, international organisations should take on more international responsibility. When international organisations, like the IMF, provide emergency financial assistance and additional support to Jordan in the fight against the epidemic, the main stated aim is to reach the families and vulnerable groups most affected by the virus and to strengthen public health system, and in the longer term, help the Middle East region overcome economic recession.⁴⁰ International Humanitarian aid to improve economic resilience did not emphasised the need for fundamental political or economic structural reforms in the recipient countries, as was the case with international economic aid prior to the epidemic before the pandemic. International Aid from international organisations has focussed on alleviating medical shortages, improving the

³⁸King of Jordan Abdullah II, 'It's times to return to globalization but this times let's do it right,' *Washington Post*, (27 April 2020), available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/its-time-to-return-to-globalization-but-this-time-lets-do-it-right/2020/04/27/b5e8b442-88b4-11ea-8ac1-bfb250876b7a_story.html.

³⁹There also exist Jordanian opinions against globalization and the inevitability of de-globalization, see K. Dervis, 'Less globalisation, more multilateralism', *The Jordan Times*, (10 June 2020), available at: <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/kemal-dervis/less-globalisation-more-multilateralisma>.

⁴⁰International Monetary Fund, 'Confronting the COVID-19 pandemic in the Middle East and Central Asia', (15 April 2020), available at: <https://www.imf.org/>.

protective capacity of national health systems, providing medical training, as well as supporting refugees and poor, unemployed, young people and empowering them through education for post-epidemic employment, and the vaccine to be used as a global public product. However, as the impact of the pandemic is not over yet the future of the global economy is still unpredictable.

Jordan's unemployment rate was already at 19%. For Jordanian nation-building, international aid to both the unemployed and the refugees in terms of financial compensation and job training could go some way to alleviating both the government's debt crisis and the crisis of domination generated by unemployment and group rivalry.

Restrictions and Information Sharing

Jordan's neighbouring countries began to face the test of epidemic preparedness almost simultaneously with Jordan. Neighbouring countries are trying to reduce cross-border communication to avoid the spread of the epidemic, while also seeking to share information to track the movement of confirmed patients. Mutual assistance between neighbours, subject to isolation, is the main way in which Jordan and its neighbours interact to prevent outbreaks. Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel have all taken steps to suspend international flights in order to level the curve and reduce the number of new cases. Saudi Arabia is Jordan's neighbour and its most important trading partner. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, the Jordanian government has had to increase controls at border crossings with Saudi Arabia and reduce the amount of land-based trade between the two countries. At the height of the outbreak, Jordan required drivers travelling between the two countries to be quarantined at specific locations to prevent the importation of the virus.

The efficient crisis-tracking information-sharing model used for epidemic preparedness may be able to be extended to cross-border counter-terrorism security cooperation beyond the end of the pandemic. However, large technical cooperation projects between Jordan and neighbouring countries have been stalled or delayed due to quarantine measures and economic difficulties. New and renewable energy projects, which were expected to contribute to the country's development, are seen by the current Jordanian as a financial burden with no technical approval. This hindrance in the exchange of personnel has led to uncertainty in the formulation and implementation of domestic policies to reassure the lower classes.

Promoting Ethnic Inclusiveness Through Fighting Pandemic Policies

A final argument for macro-political integration that affects nation-building is the avoidance of ethnic divisions. This means weakening the borders drawn by groups such as ethnic groups, tribes and sects, or reinforcing the extent to which borders overlap. Divided social structures can exacerbate conflict.⁴¹ Jordan was established on

⁴¹Ibid., p. 179.

both secular and religious conservative principles.⁴² While religious sectarian issues have been a major source of communal tensions that have plagued regional politics in the Middle East in recent years, Jordan's communal problems have arisen primarily over tribal divisions and between refugees and nationals, rather than over religious or linguistic differences. The problems that ethnic cleavages in Jordan are centred on the intra-clan politics of the tribes affecting the fight against the pandemic and the resentment of citizens caused by the increased burden of epidemic preparedness on refugees.

Integrating Communal politics

For political reform advocates pushing for democratisation in the Middle East, the fight against the epidemic in the region is likely to give governments the power to tighten people's right to freedom of expression under the pretext of controlling the spread of the virus. In a context where freedom of expression has become highly politicised, the emergency privilege could easily be construed as an abuse. Many developing countries have had to contend with rumours that would erode government initiatives to prevent the pandemic. Even before the outbreak, Jordanian social movement political activists were advocating for the protection of freedom of expression while denouncing political corruption. The government, for its part, pushed for the controversial Cybercrimes Act (2015) to tighten controls on social media statements. Given the growth of opposition-led social movements prior to the epidemic, it is likely that such movements will return once the epidemic is over, and the Jordanian government is likely to hold on to the emergency privileges that come with the epidemic as opposed to the heavy-handed repression.

As a developing country in desperate need of external economic and security assistance, Jordan is generally a Middle Eastern country with a government that cares deeply about Western political commentary and a population that is highly receptive to Western political doctrine. In response to these concerns, on 17 March, Razzaz took to social media to emphasise the distinction between the right to expression and the dissemination of rumours in a government post. He explained that the former is a protected right, while the latter can only create fear, and said that the government is determined and clear about the distinction between the two and will continue to punish those who spread unconfirmed information.⁴³

Indeed, before the government officially declared the right to spread rumours, the media reported news of people being arrested for spreading rumours about the virus. But Jordan's entrenched tribal politics still protects what should be punishable behaviour. The Jordanian press has also expressed concern that favouritism and intra-clan politics could affect the implementation of the law.⁴⁴ The protection of the privacy of individuals with COVID-19 is also seen as something that should not be freely

⁴²M. Bani Salameh, 'Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian state: containment or fragmentation bets (1999-2018)', *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6(1), (2021), p. 62.

⁴³Official Twitter account of Prime Ministry Jordan, (17 March 2020), available at: <https://twitter.com/PrimeMinistry/status/1239977492502523904?s=20>.

⁴⁴A. Tamimi, 'Statement from the Al-Talafheh clan connected to the 'zafaf party' in Irbid', *Al Ghad*, (20 March 2020).

disclosed simply by sharing information. The incompatibility between increasingly transparent behaviour in publicising outbreak information and the expansion of new administrative control powers by governments reveals a paradox in state governance: on the one hand, intensive public scrutiny and state containment of the virus has a positive effect; on the other, many ruling governments in developing countries are immature and insufficiently monitored, so that emergency privileges may be used to suppress other political forces that are disaffected by the government.

Protecting Refugees from COVID-19

The compounded devastation of the pandemic is far from over. An important feature of Jordan's ethnic structure is the large number of refugees in the country.⁴⁵ Statistically, along with neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Iran, Jordan is one of the world's largest recipient of refugees.⁴⁶ The IMF estimates that Jordan is host to around 1.3 million refugees, especially since the Syrian civil war, which has overwhelmed the small country. In the past, war in neighbouring countries has increased Jordan's military investment in securing its borders, which has directly contributed to the cost of hosting refugees. Each year, a large proportion of Jordan's international aid is refugee aid. In the aftermath of the epidemic, refugee camp residents feared both an outbreak in the communities and lacked basic sanitation facilities.

The lack of resources in Jordan has created animosity between the country's burgeoning population and the influx of refugees into its territory. The large number of refugees in Jordan, not all of whom live in camps, makes it difficult to cover them all on a large scale. However, refugee testing has a direct bearing on the ultimate timing of the end of the outbreak in refugee-hosting countries like Jordan. Jordan is a net importer of food and even relies on foreign imports for over 90% of its consumer goods such as tea, coffee and vegetable oil. The food crisis that accompanies a global outbreak will inevitably affect the national stability of a net food-importing country like Jordan. The increase in the number of refugees and their stay in the country has added to Jordan's food challenges. Jordan's public debt will only increase if the King's proposal for refugees to have access to the same education and health services as other citizens is fully implemented. Without generous external economic assistance, it is unrealistic to balance government spending, community equity and economic relief. Although not yet fully liquidated, it is clear that the economic costs of Jordan's draconian epidemic control initiatives will also eventually fall on its citizens. Changes in taxation on the population will widen this inequality, and it is likely that, future political turmoil will be activated by sentiment towards refugees due to economic constraints. The refugee problem in Jordan is by no means a problem that can be solved by mere domestic political development or political reform in Jordan. Global cooperation is essential to alleviate the refugee dilemma.

⁴⁵M. Bani Saleme, W. Abudalbouh and R. Al-Silwani, 'The socio-political implications of the Syrian refugee crisis on Jordan: 2011-2018', *Journal of Politics and Law* 13(1), (2020), pp. 93–94.

⁴⁶Pew Research Center, 'Middle East's migrant population more than doubles since 2005', (18 October 2016), p. 15, available at: <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/>.

Conclusions

The King of Jordan's proposal for re-globalisation is typical of proponents of globalisation who want to cooperate with each other. If state-centrism becomes the dominant political trend worldwide, it will be a disaster for small countries. In the case of developing countries, globalisation, or more critically, re-globalisation with adjustments, is a global trend that is indispensable for these countries to maintain their domestic political integration and achieve nation-building. This is particularly true after the normalisation of the pandemic.

Developing countries cannot afford to design all the political systems and economic structures on their own, as returning expatriates, refugees and people who have experienced the difficulties of the epidemic need to rebuild their homes. They are eager for regional powers and world powers to share the costs of rebuilding after the epidemic, and for countries around the world to cooperate to eliminate injustice and restore confidence in common development. Otherwise, disease, poverty, unemployment and inequality will remain in all corners of the world, and unrest and war will breed there.

As stated in 'Fighting COVID-19: China in Action'⁴⁷, people's longing for a happy life has never changed, and a global community of a shared future pursuing win-win cooperation can unite these common goals.

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⁴⁷The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 'Fighting COVID-19: China in action', (7 June 2020), available at: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/>.