ISSUE BRIEF

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Israel and Jordan: From Warriors to Peacemakers

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan became the second Arab country after Egypt to recognize Israel when it signed a comprehensive peace agreement that ended nearly five decades of warfare. Shepherded by United States President Bill Clinton, the accord signed on Oct. 6, 1994, marked the onset of a new era of economic, cultural, and political dialogue and cooperation between the two countries.

Jordan Prohibits Jews from Jerusalem Holy Places

Five decades earlier, when Israel declared its independence in 1948, Jordan joined other Arab nations in waging war on the nascent state. After Israel successfully repelled the invading Arab armies and an armistice agreement was signed, Jordan annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which previously had remained under British occupation.

Jordan retained control over the West Bank and Jerusalem for nearly two decades. During that time, in direct violation of the armistice agreement, Jordanian authorities prohibited Jews from accessing their holy sites in Jerusalem and vandalized synagogues, cemeteries, and other holy places. Likewise, Arab assaults posed a persistent threat to the Jewish population. Thousands of Jews were expelled. Barbed wire and concrete walls manned by Jordanian snipers divided the city along the armistice lines.

During the 1967 war against the armies of Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, Israel captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem, unified the city, declared it Israel's capital, and expelled Arab troops from the area. Israel instantly eliminated Arab restraints on the city, permitting members of all religions to access their respective holy sites.

Following the 1967 war, Palestinians in Jordanian refugee camps, operating under the aegis of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), attempted to stage a coup against the Jordanian government. Several years of war ensued, ending at last when King Hussein expelled the PLO from the country. Tens of thousands of people – including scores of civilians – died over the course of the war.

Peace Agreement Establishes Full Relations

In July 1988, after the Palestinians had launched their first intifada, Jordan's King Hussein formally renounced his nation's claim to the West Bank. Six years later, Jordan's King Hussein signed a comprehensive peace agreement with Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, becoming the second Arab leader after Egypt's President Anwar Sadat to recognize the Jewish state. The accord led to the establishment of full diplomatic, trade, cultural and educational relations.

After the signing of the peace agreement, Jordan abolished its boycott of Israel, and the two countries signed a trade agreement in 1995. In the ensuing years, the two countries further enhanced their economic ties by signing additional agreements to facilitate increased trade between the two countries.

Still, the Israeli-Jordanian relationship has experienced occasional difficulties. In the wake of the Palestinian intifada in 2000, Jordan withdrew its ambassador from Israel in protest. Such events, however, constitute anomalies in an overwhelmingly positive relationship.

Israel and Jordan Expand Security Ties

In recent years, the two countries have worked together combat in the increased threat from terrorism by coordinating their security efforts and preventing infiltrations across their shared border. When an al-Qaeda-linked group staged a rocket attack in Aqaba on August 19, 2005, Israel and Jordan closely coordinated their response. Such cooperation provides a model for how Israel and her Arab neighbors can work together to combat the growing threat of terrorism in the region.