

Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations

Updated April 14, 2022

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

RL33546



RL33546

April 14, 2022

Jeremy M. Sharp
Specialist in Middle
Eastern Affairs

Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a key U.S. partner in the Middle East, and the two countries have cooperated on a number of regional and international issues. Jordan remains at peace with Israel and is a primary interlocutor with the Palestinians. Ongoing instability in neighboring Syria and Iraq magnifies Jordan's strategic importance to the United States. Jordan also is a longtime U.S. partner in global counterterrorism operations. U.S.-Jordanian military, intelligence, and diplomatic cooperation seeks to empower political moderates, reduce sectarian conflict, and eliminate terrorist threats.

U.S. officials frequently express their support for Jordan. U.S. assistance has helped Jordan address serious vulnerabilities, both internal and external. Jordan's small size, refugee burden, and lack of major economic resources have made it dependent on aid from Western and various Arab sources. The Biden Administration has acknowledged Jordan's role as a key U.S. partner in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, as many U.S. policymakers advocate for continued robust U.S. assistance to the kingdom. Jordan also hosts over 3,000 U.S. troops.

Annual U.S. aid to Jordan has nearly quadrupled in historical terms over the last 15 years. The United States has provided economic and military aid to Jordan since 1951 and 1957, respectively. Total bilateral U.S. aid (overseen by the Departments of State and Defense) to Jordan through FY2019 amounted to approximately \$23.8 billion. The President's FY2023 budget request includes \$1.45 billion for Jordan. The current five-year U.S.-Jordanian Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on assistance expires at the end of FY2022, and the two countries are negotiating a new agreement.

To date, the impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on Jordan has been significant in terms of human and economic costs. As of early April 2022, Jordan has had over 1.6 million cases and over 14,000 deaths according to the World Health Organization. Real GDP contracted by -1.5% in 2020 and grew by 2% in 2021. Losses in government revenue caused by fewer remittances and a weakened market for tourism are expected to widen the budget deficit in the years ahead.

In the 117th Congress, P.L. 117-103, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022, provides \$1.65 billion in total bilateral foreign assistance to Jordan. This includes over \$1.2 billion in Economic Support Funds (ESF), of which \$845 million is specified as a direct cash transfer to the Jordanian government. The act also provides \$425 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF). Since the current MOU on assistance between the United States and Jordan commits the United States to provide "no less than \$1.275 billion per year in U.S. bilateral foreign assistance," Congress has appropriated nearly \$400 million for Jordan above and beyond what was agreed upon in the MOU for FY2022.

In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying P.L. 117-103, appropriators note that the act "supports critical economic assistance needed this fiscal year to help ensure Jordan's ongoing stability, including to strengthen Jordan's borders and to help mitigate the impact of hosting millions of refugees." They also direct the Secretary of State to "continue to support the Government of Jordan's efforts to implement economic and democratic reforms" and to "consult with the Committees on Appropriations on prospective policy proposals aimed at assisting Jordan achieve additional and long-lasting reforms, including in its water and public sectors."

Beyond assistance from the State and Foreign Operations appropriations accounts, P.L. 117-103 also provides Jordan with security assistance from Defense Department appropriations accounts. The act specifies that Jordan receive "not less than" \$150 million from the Defense Department's Operation and Maintenance, Defense-Wide account for the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to reimburse Jordan for border security. Starting in FY2016 (Section 1226 of P.L. 114-92), successive National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs) have authorized the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to provide support, on a reimbursement basis, to Jordan (among other countries) for the purpose of supporting and enhancing its military's efforts to increase security along the border with Iraq and Syria. P.L. 117-103 also includes "up to" \$500 million in Defense Department assistance to support "the armed forces of Jordan and to enhance security along its borders." The act also includes authority for loan guarantees for Jordan.

Contents

Overview	1
Country Background	1
The Hashemite Royal Family.....	3
Dispute within the Royal Family	4
International Investigations.....	5
Political System and Key Institutions	5
Political Reform and Popular Unrest	6
Economy.....	9
Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinians.....	10
Water Scarcity	12
Syria and Lebanon.....	14
U.S. Relations.....	15
The Case of Ahlam al Tamimi.....	16
U.S. Foreign Assistance to Jordan.....	17
U.S.-Jordanian Agreement on Foreign Assistance	17
Economic Assistance.....	18
Humanitarian Assistance for Syrian Refugees in Jordan	20
Military Assistance.....	21
Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and DOD Security Assistance.....	21
Excess Defense Articles.....	22

Figures

Figure 1. Jordan at a Glance	3
Figure 2. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein	3
Figure 3. Jordan's Projected National Debt	9
Figure 4. King Abdullah II meets Israel's President	11
Figure 5. Jordan's Water Vulnerability.....	13
Figure 6. State Department and USAID Assistance to Jordan, FY2011-FY2021	18
Figure 7. U.S. Cash Transfers to Jordan.....	19
Figure 8. U.S., Jordan Sign Aid Agreement	20
Figure 9. U.S.-Supplied Black Hawk Helicopters for Jordan	21

Tables

Table 1. Bilateral Aid to Jordan.....	17
Table 2. U.S. Foreign Aid Obligations to Jordan: 1946-2019	22

Contacts

Author Information.....	23
-------------------------	----

Overview

In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (hereinafter referred to as “Jordan”), economic hardship exacerbated by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the rise of global commodities prices as a result of war in Ukraine are straining the political system.¹ Over the past year, the reign of 60-year-old King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein (hereinafter King Abdullah II), has been challenged from within the royal family, as the king’s half-brother Hamzah voiced rare public criticism of the monarch (**see below**). Public infighting within the royal family, periodic protests from economically disaffected Jordanians, and the spring 2022 resumption in Israeli-Palestinian violence may be cause for concern among some U.S. policymakers. The United States considers Jordan a key partner in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, countering terrorism, and promoting interfaith cooperation in a volatile region. No other country in the world receives as much direct U.S. economic budgetary aid on an annual basis as Jordan (**see below**).

Before the pandemic, Jordan had already faced numerous domestic challenges that have been aggravated by regional and global developments. Demographically, the population has doubled from 5.5 million to nearly 11 million since King Abdullah II ascended the throne in 1999.² Since 2011, Syrian refugees (674,000 registered with the United Nations as of April 2022) have resided in Jordan, where the kingdom and international aid agencies have provided them with basic services. Water availability is approaching crisis levels; according to the World Resources Institute, Jordan ranks as the fifth most water-stressed country in the world.³ Economically, Jordan has endured a decade of stagnation, in which per capita incomes have declined, youth unemployment has grown and social unrest among young, educated Jordanians has grown.⁴

U.S. officials frequently express their support for Jordan, citing its role in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, upholding U.S. policy toward Syria, and having a moderating influence in the Arab world, both in its regional outlook and internal politics.⁵ Many U.S. policymakers advocate for continued robust U.S. assistance to the kingdom. Annual aid to Jordan has nearly quadrupled in historical terms over the past 15 years.

One policy dilemma for the Biden Administration is how to strengthen Jordan when violence between Israel and the Palestinians continues to flare. The Administration has not committed to restarting direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. With Israeli-Palestinian tensions high after several killings in Israel in spring 2022, the Administration is relying on Jordan to play an active diplomatic role in deescalating tensions (**see below**).

Country Background

Jordan is arguably one of the closest U.S. Arab partners in the Middle East. The kingdom depends on its strong relations with global powers and its standing in the international community, where

¹ Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Jordan’s Reforms hit by Global Economic Shocks of War in Ukraine,” *The National* (UAE), March 22, 2022.

² For demographic estimates, see The United Nations, *2019 Revision of World Population Prospects*.

³ Hannah Dormido, “These Countries are the Most at Risk from a Water Crisis,” *Bloomberg*, August 6, 2019.

⁴ See United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Jordan, Economic Development, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/jordan/economic-growth-and-trade>.

⁵ U.S. Embassy in Jordan, Secretary of State Blinken’s Meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II, May 26, 2021.

it has played an outsized role in leading international organizations.⁶ Jordan's small size and lack of major economic resources have made it dependent on aid from Western and various Arab sources. U.S. support, in particular, has helped Jordan deal with serious vulnerabilities, both internal and external. Jordan's geographic position—wedged between Israel, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia—has made it vulnerable to the strategic designs of its powerful neighbors but has also given Jordan an important role as a buffer between these countries in their largely adversarial relations with one another.

Jordan, created by colonial powers after World War I, initially consisted of desert or semidesert territory east of the Jordan River, inhabited largely by people of Bedouin tribal background, the original “East Bank” Jordanians.⁷ The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 brought large numbers of Palestinian refugees to Jordan, which subsequently unilaterally annexed a Palestinian enclave west of the Jordan River known as the West Bank—later captured by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.⁸ The “East Bank” Jordanians, though probably no longer a majority in Jordan, remain predominant in the country's political and military establishments and form the bedrock of support for the Jordanian monarchy. Jordanians of Palestinian origin make up an estimated 55% to 70% of the population. They tend to gravitate toward employment in the private sector, most likely due to their alleged general exclusion from certain public-sector and military positions.⁹

⁶ For example, Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, a member of the Hashemite dynasty (from the branch of the royal family that had ruled Iraq), served as the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2014 to 2018. In September 2021, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous became Executive Director of UN Women and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.

⁷ For historical background, see Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, Country Profile: Jordan, September 2006.

⁸ Though there was little international recognition of Jordan's annexation of the West Bank, Jordan maintained control of it (including East Jerusalem) until Israel took military control of it during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and maintained its claim to it until relinquishing the claim to the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1988.

⁹ Speculation over the ratio of East Bankers to Palestinians (those who arrived as refugees and immigrants since 1948 and their descendants) in Jordanian society is a sensitive domestic issue. Jordan last conducted a national census in 2015, and it is unclear whether or not the government maintains such national-origin statistics. Over time, intermarriage has made it more difficult to discern distinct differences between the two communities, though divisions do persist.

Figure 1. Jordan at a Glance



Area: 89,342 sq. km. (34,495 sq. mi., slightly smaller than Indiana).

Population: 10,998,531 (2022); Amman (capital): 2.2 million (2022).

Country of Origin: Jordanian 69.3%, Syrian 13.3%, Palestinian 6.7%, Egyptian 6.7%, Iraqi 1.4%, other 2.6% (includes Armenian, Circassian) (2015 est.) note: data represent population by self-identified nationality

Religion: Sunni Muslim 97.2%; Christian 2.2%; Buddhist 0.4%; Hindu 0.1%.

Percent of Population Under Age 25: 54% (2018).

Literacy: 98.2% (2018).

Youth Unemployment (ages 15-24): 37.3.1% (2019).

Source: Graphic created by CRS using figures from CIA World Factbook.

The Hashemite Royal Family

Jordan is a hereditary constitutional monarchy under the prestigious Hashemite family, which claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad. King Abdullah II (age 60) has ruled the country since 1999, when he succeeded to the throne upon the death of his father, the late King Hussein, who had ruled for 47 years. Educated largely in Britain and the United States, King Abdullah II had earlier pursued a military career, ultimately serving as commander of Jordan's Special Operations Forces with the rank of major general. The king's son, Prince Hussein bin

Figure 2. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein



Source: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock.com.

Abdullah (born in 1994), is the designated crown prince.¹⁰

The king appoints a prime minister to head the government and the Council of Ministers (cabinet). On average, Jordanian governments last no more than 15 months before they are dissolved by royal decree. The king also appoints all judges and is commander of the armed forces.

Dispute within the Royal Family

Over the past two years, King Abdullah II has been embroiled in political and familial tensions and controversies. In April 2021, reports of a plot to overthrow King Abdullah II jolted Jordan's domestic political scene. On April 3, Jordanian authorities detained 41-year-old Prince Hamzah bin Hussein, the king's half-brother and the country's former crown prince, accusing him of conspiring against the throne. In his defense, Prince Hamzah released two videotaped statements (one in English and the other in Arabic), filmed on the day of his arrest, denying any participation in a conspiracy while criticizing the country's ruling system for its corruption, nepotism, and lack of reform. The Jordanian government then claimed that Prince Hamzah had collaborated with former Chief of the Royal Court Bassem Awadallah and unnamed "foreign entities" to destabilize the kingdom.¹¹ Awadallah, at the time serving as an advisor to Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, was arrested along with 17 other prominent Jordanians on April 3.¹²

While the king and his half-brother eventually formally reconciled, Awadallah (who holds U.S., Saudi, and Jordanian citizenship) and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid al Nasser (a distant member of the royal family with business ties to Saudi Arabia) stood trial for sedition. On July 12, the court pronounced them guilty and sentenced Awadallah and Sharif Hassan to 15 years each in prison. In September, Jordan's Court of Cassation upheld the July 2021 sentence of Awadallah and bin Zaid.

In April 2022, just weeks after releasing an apology letter to King Abdullah II, Prince Hamzah unilaterally renounced his royal title as "prince."¹³ As of mid-April, the Royal Court has not responded to Hamzah's actions. Article 37 of Jordan's constitution confers the creation and withdrawal of honorific titles to the king. At this point, it is unclear whether Prince Hamzah's move will be accepted by King Abdullah II and, if so, what Hamzah's political future in or outside of Jordan may be.

¹⁰ In July 2009, King Abdullah II named his son, Prince Hussein (then 15 years old), as crown prince. The position had been vacant since 2004, when King Abdullah II removed the title from his half-brother, Prince Hamzah. Crown Prince al Hussein bin Abdullah II, now 27, is a graduate of Georgetown University and the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (UK). He holds the rank of second lieutenant in the Jordan Armed Forces.

¹¹ Jassar al Tahat and Richard Spencer, "Family Feud and Jealousy behind Split in Arab Royal Family Loved by the West," *The Times* (UK), April 14, 2021.

¹² On April 5, the *Washington Post* reported that during a surprise Saudi delegation visit to Amman led by Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan, the Saudi government requested the release of Bassem Awadallah. Shira Rubin, Sarah Dadouch, and Joby Warrick, "Jordan's Prince Hamzeh, under House Arrest after Alleged Coup Attempt, Appears to Affirm Loyalty to the King," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2021. Originally born in East Jerusalem, Bassem Awadallah was a former minister of international cooperation and planning and finance. As mentioned in the text, he had also served as chief of the king's Royal Court. He later worked for the Arab Bank and served on the board of a banking group in Bahrain.

¹³ The prince's letter is written in Arabic and was posted on Twitter at https://twitter.com/HamzahHKJ/status/1510619201827917827?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1510619201827917827%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.com%2Farabic%2Flive%2F60934210

International Investigations

In early October 2021, an international consortium of investigative journalists and news companies, including *The Washington Post*, published a series of articles referred to as the Pandora Papers in which King Abdullah II featured prominently. The reports allege that over a ten-year period, King Abdullah II personally spent \$106 million on various properties, including luxury residences in Malibu, California.¹⁴ The Royal Court denied any impropriety, claiming that the transactions were hidden for security reasons, that no public funds were used, and that the properties were often used to host officials and foreign dignitaries.¹⁵ *The Washington Post* coverage of the Pandora Papers release focused on how the king's personal financial transactions have roughly coincided with "a 10-year stretch that has been marked by mounting economic hardship in Jordan, rising public frustration with suspected corruption surrounding the king, and growing political instability that culminated this year in an alleged coup plot."¹⁶

In February 2022, another international consortium of investigative journalists published findings derived from 70 years of leaked bank account information at the Swiss bank Credit Suisse. In the last decade, King Abdullah II and Queen Rania were found to have maintained multiple accounts between them, with one previously active account holding a balance of \$224 million.¹⁷ The Royal Hashemite Court issued a press statement following news of the investigation, claiming that some of the funds in Credit Suisse accounts were from sales of aircraft used "to cover the private expenses of the Hashemite family" and that "all international assistance is subject to professional audits, and their allocations are fully accounted for by the government and donor entities."¹⁸

Political System and Key Institutions

The Jordanian constitution, most recently amended in 2022, gives the king broad executive powers.¹⁹ The king appoints the prime minister and may dismiss him or accept his resignation. He also has the sole power to appoint the crown prince, senior military leaders, justices of the constitutional court, and all 75 members of the senate, as well as cabinet ministers. The constitution enables the king to dissolve both houses of parliament and postpone lower house elections for two years.²⁰ The king can circumvent parliament through a constitutional mechanism that allows the cabinet to issue provisional legislation when parliament is not sitting or has been dissolved.²¹ The king also must approve laws before they can take effect, although a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament can modify legislation. The king also can issue royal

¹⁴ Greg Miller, "While His Country Struggles, Jordan's King Abdullah Secretly Splurges," *Washington Post*, October 3, 2021.

¹⁵ Jon Sharman and Daniel Keane, "Pandora Papers News—Live: World Leaders Deny Wrongdoing after Huge Leak of Financial Documents Trove of Secret Files Lays Bare Offshore Schemes Used by World's Richest to Hide Their Fortunes," *The Independent* (UK), October 4, 2021.

¹⁶ Op. cit., *Washington Post*, October 3, 2021.

¹⁷ Jesse Drucker and Ben Hubbard, "Vast Leak Exposes How Credit Suisse Served Strongmen and Spies," *New York Times*, February 20, 2022.

¹⁸ Twitter, Statement from the Royal Hashemite Court, February 21, 2022.

¹⁹ In the last decade, Jordan's constitution has been amended three times (2011, 2016, and 2022).

²⁰ The king also may declare martial law. According to Article 125, "In the event of an emergency of such a serious nature that action under the preceding Article of the present Constitution will be considered insufficient for the defense of the Kingdom, the King may by a Royal Decree, based on a decision of the Council of Ministers, declare martial law in the whole or any part of the Kingdom."

²¹ Amendments to Article 94 in 2011 have put some restrictions on when the executive is allowed to issue temporary laws.

decrees, which are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The king commands the armed forces, declares war, and ratifies treaties. Finally, Article 195 of the Jordanian Penal Code prohibits insulting the dignity of the king (*lèse-majesté*), with criminal penalties of one to three years in prison. Article 38 of the constitution grants the king the power to issue pardons.

Successive Jordanian parliaments have mostly complied with the policies laid out by the Royal Court. The legislative branch's independence has been curtailed not only by a legal system that rests authority largely in the hands of the monarch, but also by electoral laws designed to produce pro-palace majorities with each new election.²² Due to frequent gerrymandering in which electoral districts arguably are drawn to favor more rural pro-government constituencies over densely populated urban areas, parliamentary elections have produced large pro-government majorities dominated by representatives of prominent tribal families.²³ In addition, voter turnout tends to be much higher in pro-government areas since many East Bank Jordanians depend on family/tribal connections as a means to access patronage jobs.²⁴

Jordan's constitution provides for an independent judiciary. According to Article 97, "Judges are independent, and in the exercise of their judicial functions they are subject to no authority other than that of the law." Jordan has three main types of courts: civil courts, special courts (some of which are military/state security courts), and religious courts. State security courts administered by military (and civilian) judges handle criminal cases involving espionage, bribery of public officials, trafficking in narcotics or weapons, black marketeering, and "security offenses."²⁵ Religious courts for both Muslims and Christians adjudicate matters of personal status, including marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.²⁶ The king may appoint and dismiss judges by decree, though in practice a palace-appointed Higher Judicial Council manages court appointments, promotions, transfers, and retirements.

Political Reform and Popular Unrest

Since his ascension to the throne in 1999, King Abdullah II has at times laid out a vision of Jordan's gradual transition from a constitutional monarchy into a full-fledged parliamentary democracy.²⁷ During periods of domestic unrest, Jordanian leaders have taken limited steps to liberalize the political system without fundamentally altering the monarchical power structure. In times of crisis, the government also often appeals for Jordanian unity,²⁸ while calling the opposition divisive or even disloyal.²⁹

²² "How Jordan's Election Revealed Enduring Weaknesses in Its Political System," *Washington Post*, October 3, 2016.

²³ Rachel Bessette, "Jordan's Parliamentary Elections: Why They Do (and Don't) Matter for the Kingdom's Future," *Lawfare*, September 29, 2016.

²⁴ Sean L. Yom, "Tribal Politics in Contemporary Jordan: The Case of the Hirak Movement," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Spring 2014), pp. 229-247.

²⁵ See U.S. Embassy in Jordan, Jordanian Legal System, available at <https://jo.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/attorneys/jordanian-legal-system/>.

²⁶ In sharia courts, the testimony of one man equals that of two women, with exceptions in certain cases. U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Jordan*, March 30, 2021.

²⁷ See "Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians," Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, January 16, 2013. Also, see Curtis R. Ryan, "The King's Speech," *Foreign Policy*, June 17, 2011.

²⁸ In 2002, just a few years into his reign and after a Palestinian uprising in the neighboring West Bank, King Abdullah II launched a nation-wide campaign known as "Jordan First," in which he called on citizens to reaffirm their "loyalty to the homeland." See, Sana Abdallah, "Jordan's King Launches Identity Campaign," *UPI*, October 31, 2002.

²⁹ "Jordan's Solid National Unity is what makes it Special—King," *Jordan Times*, September 16, 2015.

Some notable examples of how the state has dealt with political unrest throughout Jordan's history include

- In **1989**, Jordan suffered a recession, and the state, in compliance with an International Monetary Fund (IMF) program, lifted subsidies on basic goods. Protests ensued and, in response, the government lifted martial law (which had been in place since 1957). The government also permitted the resumption of parliamentary elections after a near 30-year absence.³⁰ In the 1989 election, Muslim Brotherhood candidates won 22 out of 80 seats in the lower house, and combined with other allied groups, controlled 34 seats total, a historic high. In 1990, King Hussein commissioned a 60-member royal committee to draft a "National Charter" which outlined an expanded role for political parties.³¹
- In **1996**, in order to deal with a recession and IMF-supported austerity measures, the government again lifted subsidies on grains and other goods, leading to weeks-long popular protests in southern Jordan. In response, King Hussein dispatched additional security forces to the town of Karak and other nearby areas, vowing to quell additional unrest with an "iron fist."³² A year later, parliament amended the Press and Publications Law, an act widely considered as restrictive of free speech.³³
- During the so-called Arab Spring between **2011 and 2013**, Jordan experienced periodic social unrest, but not nearly at the same level as some of its neighbors. In 2011 as part of a broad package of reforms, the king promised to permanently amend the electoral law in order to guarantee fairness and transparency of the electoral process. In 2012, parliament passed a new electoral law, which provided voters with two ballots, one for geographical district representatives under the old system and another for a nation-wide closed proportional list system. It also increased the total number of seats in parliament from 120 to 150 and created a new independent electoral commission to oversee elections rather than the generally mistrusted Interior Ministry. Despite these changes, parliamentary elections in January 2013 produced another overwhelmingly pro-palace parliament. In 2012, at the height of unrest in the Middle East, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries pledged \$5 billion to Jordan.
- In **2018**, Jordan once again was in the throes of economic difficulties and turned to the IMF for additional financing. To comply with IMF-mandated reforms, the Jordanian government drafted a new tax bill to increase personal income taxes and thus raise government revenue and ease the public debt burden. Large-scale demonstrations ensued, and the government was forced to revise its tax legislation. To bolster Jordan's finances, the Gulf Arab states of Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia collectively pledged \$2.5 billion for Jordan.

³⁰ After losing control of the West Bank to Israel in 1967, Jordan did not conduct a new election until after it renounced its claim to the West Bank in 1988.

³¹ A copy of the 1990 National Charter is available at <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/charter-national.html>

³² Scott Peterson, "Bread Riots in Jordan Force King to Wield an 'Iron Fist,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, August 19, 1996.

³³ Russell E. Lucas, "Press Laws as a Survival Strategy in Jordan, 1989-99," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Oct., 2003, pp. 81-98.

Unlike in neighboring Egypt, the kingdom tolerates Muslim Brotherhood political activity, and Brotherhood candidates sometimes compete in parliamentary elections. (The Brotherhood also has boycotted previous elections in protest.) The Brotherhood is currently divided between Islamists who are willing to participate in the political system and those who reject it. In 2020, Brotherhood candidates ran together on a list called the National Alliance Reform and won 10 seats (down from 16 in the 2016 election); of those 10, 6 belonged to actual Islamist-leaning candidates.³⁴

Gender Issues in Jordan

Jordan has consistently ranked among the bottom performers of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap index (131 of 156 countries in 2021). Some have pointed to "traditional attitudes, discriminatory legislation, a lack of access to public transportation and pay disparities" as barriers to women's advancement in Jordan.³⁵ Despite having one of the highest rates of female literacy in the Middle East, Jordan's female labor force participation rate is considered low (15% as of 2021).³⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this trend, as female unemployment increased between 2019 and 2020.³⁷ Unequal pay also is an issue in Jordan, where the gender wage gap (as of 2018) is estimated at 18% in the public sector and 14% in the private sector.³⁸

In 2022, Jordan amended the title of Chapter Two of the constitution, which guarantees equal rights of all citizens. The title now reads, "The Rights and Duties of Jordanian Men and Women"; previously, it had been "Rights and Duties of Jordanians." During parliamentary debate over this change, an altercation broke out, as some Jordanian lawmakers opposed granting women greater equality, especially on matters of inheritance and citizenship.³⁹

Jordan has received funding through the USAID-administered Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Fund, launched in 2019, specifically to support government efforts to amend the country's labor code to prohibit gender discrimination.⁴⁰ USAID allocates U.S. bilateral economic assistance to support programs that protect victims of gender-based violence, improve women's access to jobs and leadership opportunities in the private sector, and support the advancement of women to decision-making positions. In addition to partnering with various government ministries, USAID also partners with the Jordanian National Commission for Women headed by Princess Basma Bint Talal, paternal aunt to King Abdullah II.

More recently, there has been some international concern that political life in Jordan has become more restrictive. While Jordan is generally considered to be somewhat more tolerant of dissent than Egypt or the Gulf Arab monarchies, the international democracy watchdog organization Freedom House changed Jordan's rating in 2021 from "partially free" to "not free," asserting that Jordan's status declined due to harsh new restrictions on freedom of assembly, among other things.⁴¹ Internet freedom is a particularly sensitive issue in Jordan, where journalists have decried the ambiguity of cybercrime legislation, such as Article 11 of the 2015 Cybercrime Law.⁴² The law states that "anyone who on purpose posts or reposts statements or information on the

³⁴ Suha Ma'ayeh and Rana F. Sweis, "Jordan's 2020 Parliamentary Election: Settling for the Status Quo," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, February 2021.

³⁵ Rana F. Sweis, "Women, 86 Percent Absent from Jordan's Work Force, are Left Behind," *New York Times*, April 3, 2021.

³⁶ Holly Welborn Benner and Anders Pedersen, "Want Jordan to prosper? Engage Women!" *World Bank Blog*, December 22, 2021.

³⁷ World Bank, "Jordan: US\$112 million to Finance National Employment Program in the Private Sector, Focused on Jobs for Youth and Women," December 22, 2021.

³⁸ International Labour Organization, *Gender Equality and Decent Work in Jordan*, April 30, 2021.

³⁹ Celine Alkhalidi, "Jordanian Lawmakers Trade Punches in Parliament amid Heated Discussion on Women's Rights," *CNN*, December 29, 2021.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Women's Global Development and Prosperity Annual Report 2020-2021*, January 2021.

⁴¹ Freedom House, *Jordan, Freedom in the World 2021*.

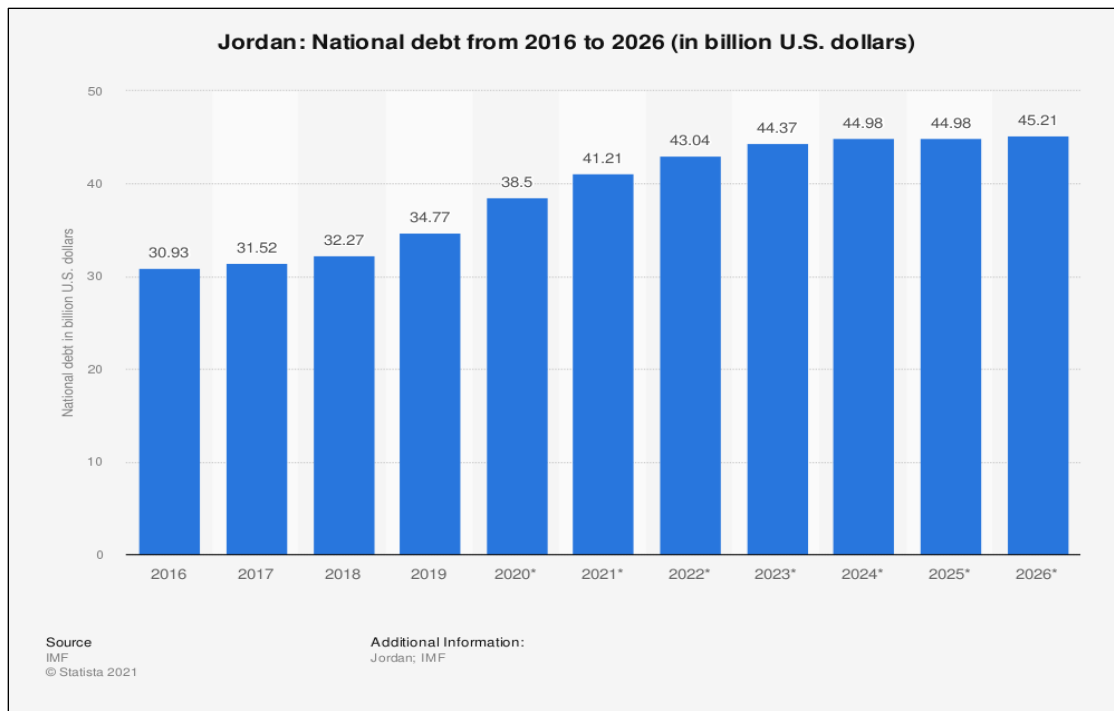
⁴² Mustafa Abu Sneineh, "Jordan: Prominent Palestinian journalist detained at airport under Cybercrime Law," *Middle East Eye*, March 8, 2022.

internet, that include tort and slander, or the denigration of anyone, faces no less than three months in jail and a fine of no less than JD100 (\$140) and not more than JD1,000 (\$1,400). In 2022, a report alleged that the Jordanian government may have used “Pegasus” software made by the Israeli company NSO Group to spy on Jordanian activists and lawyers.⁴³

Economy

For 2022, Jordan’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to grow by a modest 2.7%; however, rising food and fuel prices stemming largely from war in Ukraine and continued global supply-chain shortages stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic may strain government finances and consumer spending. Jordanian GDP grew 2% in 2021 after contracting 1.5% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, the IMF has disbursed \$1.2 billion in financing to Jordan.⁴⁴

Figure 3. Jordan’s Projected National Debt



Source: Statista.

Notes Based on figures from the World Economic Outlook Database, October 2021.

Servicing Jordan’s growing national debt (see **Figure 3**), nearly 100% of GDP in 2022, continues to constrain government spending, increasing the possibility that without external assistance, costs in the form of increased taxes and reduced subsidies may be passed on to Jordanian

⁴³ Josef Federman, “Israeli Firm’s Spyware used on Jordan Activists, Report says,” Associated Press, March 5, 2022.

⁴⁴ International Monetary Fund, IMF Executive Board Concludes Third Review Under Jordan’s Extended Arrangement, January 2022.

consumers. During Jordan's last fiscal budgetary cycle, the government claims it received \$4 billion in foreign aid.⁴⁵

With unemployment hovering around 24% and 70% of the population under the age of 35, Jordanian workers face difficult prospects in seeking private and public sector employment.⁴⁶ According to Arab Barometer, a quantitative research organization that conducts public opinion polling in the Middle East

An overwhelming majority (four-in-five) of Jordanians evaluated their current economic situation poorly, and a minority (one-in-three) predicted economic relief in the next 2-3 years. Youth ages 18-29 were the least optimistic towards the economy in the near future, driving a substantial proportion - almost half - of them to consider emigrating.⁴⁷

Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinians

The Jordanian government has long described efforts to secure a lasting end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as one of its highest priorities. In 1994, Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty.⁴⁸ Nearly 28 years after the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, the persistence of Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be a major challenge for Jordan, as the issue of Palestinian rights resonates with much of the population, and the conflict has soured attempts to improve Jordanian-Israeli people-to-people relations.

Since the 2021 formation of a coalition government in Israel, Jordanian-Israeli relations have markedly improved. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's first trip abroad was to Amman to meet with King Abdullah II. Soon thereafter, Prime Minister Bennett announced that Israel had agreed to sell Jordan 50 million cubic meters of additional water annually from the Sea of Galilee; in October 2021, Israel and Jordan formalized the agreement. The Biden Administration praised the deal, including Israel's additional approval of an increase in the value of Jordanian exports (cement, construction materials, rugs, clothing and electronics) to the West Bank from \$160 million to \$700 million per year.⁴⁹

During a fall 2021 aerial multi-national military exercise in Israel (Blue Flag), Jordan quietly participated, sending several of its F-16s to fly outside of Israel's Ovda airbase north of Eilat, according to media reports.⁵⁰ During the two-week drill, the commander of the United Arab Emirates Air Force visited Israel to observe. While there had been speculation surrounding

⁴⁵ "Jordan Receives \$300 Million in Foreign Aid in 2021," *Jordan News Agency (Petra)*, August 1, 2021.

⁴⁶ Taylor Luck, "For Jordan's Unemployed Youth, a Career Opportunity: Local Politics," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 23, 2022.

⁴⁷ Arab Barometer VI, Jordan Country Report, 2021.

⁴⁸ Jordan and Israel signed the peace treaty on October 26, 1994. Later, the two countries exchanged ambassadors, Israel returned approximately 131 square miles of territory near the Rift Valley to Jordan, Jordan's parliament repealed laws banning contacts with Israel, and the two countries signed a number of bilateral agreements between 1994 and 1996 to normalize economic and cultural links. Water sharing, a recurring problem, is delineated in Annex II of the treaty and coordinated by the Joint Water Committee comprised of Israeli and Jordanian officials. According to the 1994 treaty, in exchange for certain Jordanian concessions to Israel, Israel agreed to supply Jordan with 50 million cubic meters of water a year from the northern part of Israel (in a separate agreement, Israel agreed to sell Jordan another 10 million cubic meters in 2010). The Annex also states that "Israel and Jordan shall cooperate in finding sources for the supply to Jordan of an additional quantity of (50) MCM/year [million cubic meters] of water of drinkable standards."

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, United States Welcomes Announcement of Israel and Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Agreements on Water and West Bank Trade, July 8, 2021.

⁵⁰ Judah Ari Gross, "German Photographer Spills the Beans: Jordan Flew in IDF Aerial Drill," *Times of Israel*, October 29, 2021.

Jordanian participation in previous Blue Flag exercises, this exercise appears to have been the first confirmed involvement.

In November 2021, Israel, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reached a trilateral energy-for-water agreement, whereby the UAE is to finance additional solar production capacity in Jordan to be exported to Israel (600 megawatts) in exchange for 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water. On November 22, 2021, Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry traveled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the signing ceremony for the energy-for-water deal, dubbed “Project Prosperity.”

Holy Sites in Jerusalem⁵¹

Per arrangements with Israel dating back to 1967 (when the Israeli military seized East Jerusalem—including its Old City—from Jordan) and then subsequently confirmed in the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, Israel acknowledges a continuing role for Jordan vis-à-vis Jerusalem’s historic Muslim shrines.⁵² A Jordanian *waqf* (or Islamic custodial trust) has long administered the Temple Mount (known by Muslims as the Haram al Sharif or Noble Sanctuary) and its holy sites, and this role is key to bolstering the religious legitimacy of the Jordanian royal family’s rule. Jordanian monarchs trace their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Disputes over Jerusalem that appear to circumscribe King Abdullah II’s role as guardian of the Islamic holy sites create a domestic political problem for the king. Jewish worship on the Mount/Haram is prohibited under a long-standing “status quo” arrangement that dates back to the era of Ottoman control before World War I.

In spring 2022, amidst a wave of attacks resulting in the death of 14 people in Israel, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority have attempted to deescalate tensions, particularly around the convergence of the holidays of Ramadan, Easter, and Passover. In meetings with Israeli officials, King Abdullah II has urged them to avoid measures that could hinder worship on the Temple Mount. During Israeli President Isaac Herzog’s March 2022 visit to Jordan, King Abdullah II told the president that nothing should harm the “legal and historical status quo of Jerusalem and [its] holy sites” and that “You and I are going to work as hard as we can with all our colleagues to maintain calm, and make sure we do not move into any unilateral measures that undermine the process of peace.”⁵³ King Abdullah II also visited the West Bank for the first time in five years in late March 2022; his visit coincided with the historic “Negev Summit,” in which the foreign ministers of Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, and Egypt convened

Figure 4. King Abdullah II meets Israel’s President

(March 2022)



Israel’s Isaac Herzog (left); Jordan’s King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein (right).

Source: Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁵¹ For more information on Jerusalem and its holy sites, see CRS Report RL33476, *Israel: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Jim Zanotti.

⁵² Article 9, Clause 2, of the peace treaty says that “Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem. When negotiations on the permanent status will take place, Israel will give high priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines.” In 2013, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) reaffirmed in a bilateral agreement with Jordan that the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan will continue to serve as the “Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem,” a title that successive Jordanian monarchs have used since 1924 (see footnote below).

⁵³ Greer Fay Cashman and Tovah Lazaroff, “Jordan’s King Abdullah Condemns Acts of Terrorism in Israel,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 30, 2022.

in Israel to further advance Israel-Arab normalization in the wake of the 2020 “Abraham Accords.” In addition to seeking calm, King Abdullah’s outreach to the Palestinians may also have been an attempt to draw international attention toward the Palestinians.

On April 1, 2022, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi in which both officials “discussed the need for calm in Jerusalem during April as Muslims, Jews, and Christians celebrate Ramadan, Passover, and Easter.”⁵⁴

Water Scarcity

Jordan is a water-poor nation and, according to the World Resources Institute, is one of the top-five most water-stressed countries in the world.⁵⁵ Jordan’s increase in water scarcity over the past 75 years is attributable to population growth, a decrease in the flow of the Yarmouk River due to the building of dams upstream in Syria, gradual declines in rainfall, and depleting groundwater resources due to overuse.⁵⁶ The illegal construction of thousands of private wells has also contributed to unsustainable groundwater extraction. The large influx of Syrian refugees has heightened water demand in the north. A Stanford University study predicts that dwindling water supplies and continued population growth will, without intervention, halve per capita water use in Jordan by the end of this century.⁵⁷

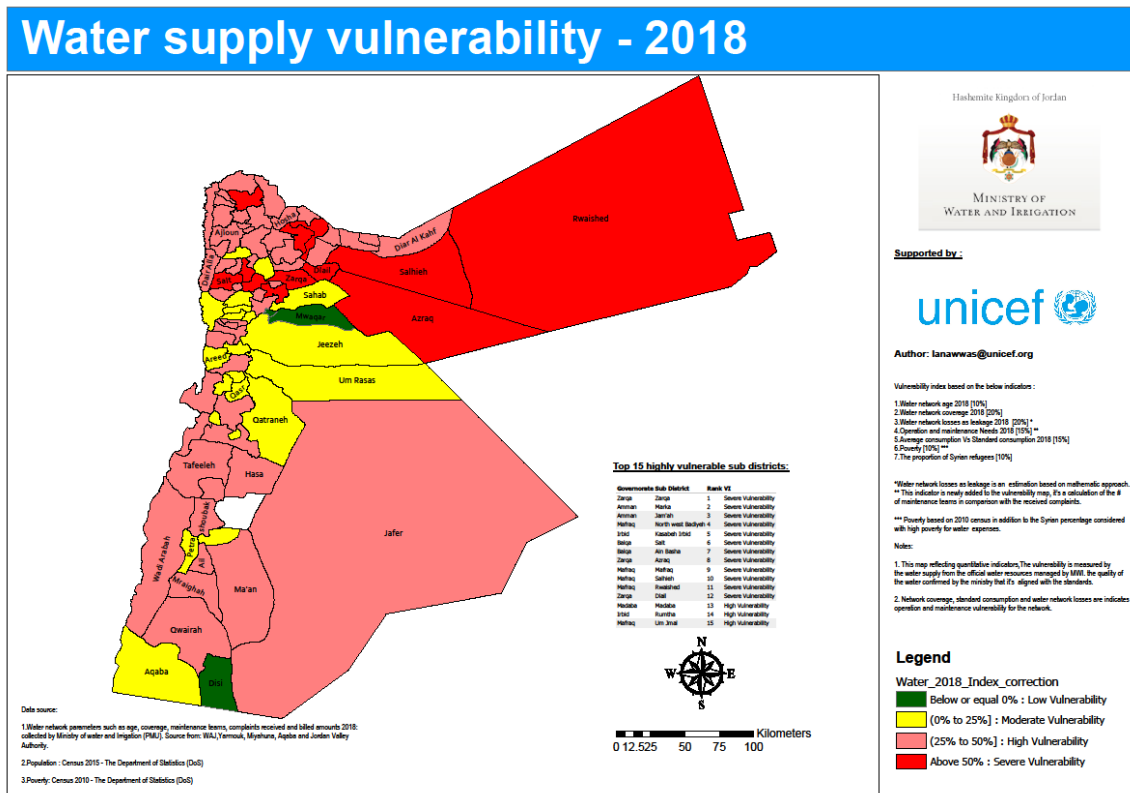
⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, Secretary Blinken’s Call with Jordanian Foreign Minister Safadi, Readout, Office of the Spokesperson, April 1, 2022.

⁵⁵ Rutger Willem Hofste, Paul Reig and Leah Schleifer, “17 Countries, Home to One-Quarter of the World’s Population, Face Extremely High Water Stress,” World Resources Institute, August 6, 2019.

⁵⁶ Deepthi Rajsekhar and Steven M. Gorelick, “Increasing drought in Jordan: Climate Change and Cascading Syrian Land-Use Impacts on Reducing Transboundary Flow,” *Science Advances*, August 30, 2017: vol. 3, no. 8.

⁵⁷ Josie Garthwaite, “Stanford Study Reveals a Deepening Water Crisis in Jordan—and a Way Forward,” Stanford University News, March 29, 2021.

Figure 5. Jordan's Water Vulnerability



Sources: Government of Jordan; U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF)

To secure new sources of water, Jordan is not only increasing regional cooperation (see above), but also pursuing domestic water development projects. In July 2021, after years of delays in evaluating the now-defunct trilateral project (Israel-Jordan-Palestinian Authority) known as the Red-Dead Sea Conveyance Project, Jordan has moved ahead with plans to build its own desalination plant in Aqaba, along with a water treatment facility, pumping station, and a 280-mile pipeline to carry water to Amman and elsewhere. The aim of the Aqaba-Amman Water Desalination and Conveyance Project (AAWDCP) is to bring 300 million cubic meters of potable water annually to water-stressed areas. USAID and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have provided funding to conduct feasibility studies.⁵⁸ The Jordanian government is currently evaluating private company bids for the \$2.5 billion project. According to USAID, the U.S. government has provided over \$10 million in technical support to the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation to study the feasibility of the AAWDCP; over the next five years, the United States government has pledged \$700 million, with \$300 million in grant funding from USAID, subject to the availability of funds, and up to \$400 million in loans to the project company from the U.S. Development Finance Corporation, subject to bankability requirements.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ USAID, Jordan Water Infrastructure, Annual Progress Report, Period 12th—July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021.

⁵⁹ CRS Correspondence with USAID, April 2022.

Syria and Lebanon

Jordanian-Syrian relations had been strained for the last decade, but over the past year have begun to normalize. In 2011, King Abdullah II was the first Arab leader to call openly for Syrian President Bashar al Asad's resignation, and Jordan supported moderate Syrian rebel groups operating in southwestern Syria until the Asad government largely defeated these groups in 2018.⁶⁰ Since the Asad regime mostly reclaimed control of southern Syria (with the help of Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah), Jordan has sought to return to normal bilateral ties. In September 2021, Syria's defense minister visited Jordan, and the main border crossing between Jordan and Syria has reopened (it had been closed due to COVID-19). In October 2021, King Abdullah II reportedly spoke over the phone with President Asad, though unlike Asad's 2022 visit to the UAE, there have been no official visits between heads of state.

Syria continues to be a source of narcotics production, as Syrian-based drug smugglers routinely attempt to penetrate Jordan's borders. Jordanian military leaders claimed that in January and February 2022, the armed forces had killed 30 smugglers and intercepted 16 million Captagon pills, which refers to the drug compound fenethylline hydrochloride.⁶¹ According to one report, in 2020 Captagon exports from Syria reached a market value of at least \$3.46 billion.⁶² Jordanian officials are not only concerned about narcotics smuggling across Jordan's borders, but also worry that domestic drug consumption is increasing. According to one report, "as much as one-fifth of the drugs smuggled in from Syria are now consumed in Jordan."⁶³

The kingdom also continues to host hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, many of whom are reluctant to return to their homes for fear of Syrian regime retribution against them.⁶⁴ As of March 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 674,268 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan. Since 2011, the influx of Syrian refugees has placed tremendous strain on Jordan's government and local economies, especially in the northern governorates of Mafraq, Irbid, Ar Ramtha, and Zarqa.

In Lebanon, which remains in the throes of a crippling economic and energy crisis, Jordan and Egypt are seeking to ease energy shortages by planning to ship natural gas and electricity into Lebanon through Jordan and Syria. These countries may need to receive a waiver from the United States in order to comply with the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-92, Title LXXIV). According to Barbara Leaf, the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, "This is a project that, as I understand, it is endorsed by the World Bank, so that the State Department is looking at it carefully within the framework of US law and sanctions policy. But it shows some promise on the face of it. And of course, the department will consult thoroughly with Treasury on the way forward."⁶⁵ In October 2021, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland stated, "one of the energy solutions that we are working on with

⁶⁰ Steven Simon and James Fromson, "Jordan's Pragmatism in Syria, How It Became a Reliable Partner to Washington," *Foreign Affairs*, June 22, 2016. "Syrian Defence Minister Visits Jordan to Discuss Deraa crisis," *The National*, September 20, 2021.

⁶¹ "Jordan says Drug Trafficking from Syria is 'Organised,'" Agence France Presse, February 17, 2022.

⁶² Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), "The Syrian Economy at War Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State," April 2021.

⁶³ Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad, "On Syria's Ruins, a Drug Empire Flourishes," *New York Times*, December 5, 2021.

⁶⁴ "Trapped in Jordan, Syrian Refugees See No Way Home," Associated Press, September 11, 2019.

⁶⁵ "Senate Foreign Relations Committee Holds Hearing on Pending Nominations," *Congressional Quarterly*, Congressional Transcripts, September 15, 2021.

Lebanese authorities, which could provide relief in weeks and months, would involve the World Bank and would involve humanitarian relief. So because it falls under the humanitarian category, no sanctions waiver would be required in this instance.”⁶⁶ Lebanese officials in late October reported that U.S. officials had issued a letter of comfort that would “make this deal possible without any ramifications vis-a-vis the sanctions.”⁶⁷

In January 2022, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea stated that the United States has helped to facilitate and encourage the deal, and had provided additional assurances to the Lebanese government regarding U.S. sanctions legislation.⁶⁸ In April 2022, Lebanon’s energy minister stated that World Bank financing was “the remaining essential step” before natural gas imports from Egypt and electricity imports from Jordan—both transiting Syria—could begin.⁶⁹ The deal has faced opposition from some Members of Congress. In a February 2022 letter to Secretary of State Blinken, the ranking Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee argued that the deal would “undoubtedly enrich the Assad regime and trigger U.S. sanctions under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act.”⁷⁰

U.S. Relations

U.S. officials frequently express their support for Jordan, citing its role in promoting Middle East peace, upholding U.S. policy toward Syria, and having a moderating influence in the Arab world, both in its regional outlook and internal politics.⁷¹ Many U.S. policymakers advocate for continued robust U.S. assistance to the kingdom. Annual aid to Jordan has nearly quadrupled in historical terms over the past 15 years. According to the U.S. State Department, the United States and Jordan have a 1996 Status of Forces Agreement, a 2006 Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, and a 2021 Defense Cooperation Agreement.⁷²

The 2021 Defense Cooperation Agreement formalizes years of U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation, which became more visible at the start of Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIL/ISIS) in 2014. Jordanian air bases have been particularly important for the U.S. conduct of intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions in Syria and Iraq. U.S. forces have operated out of various Jordanian air bases, such as Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Azraq, Jordan.⁷³ While the United States never officially acknowledged its presence at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base prior to the 2021 agreement, according to

⁶⁶ U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, “Media Availability with Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland,” October 14, 2021.

⁶⁷ Sunniva Rose, “Lebanon to get six more Hours of Power a Day in Syria-Egypt Gas Deal, says Minister,” *The National*, October 21, 2021.

⁶⁸ U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, “Ambassador Dorothy C. Shea Statement at the Grand Serail,” January 14, 2022.

⁶⁹ “Energy Minister Walid Fayad says World Bank financing is the “remaining essential step” for unlocking Egyptian and Jordanian power supply,” *L’Orient Today*, April 9, 2022.

⁷⁰ “Risch, McCaul Express Concern over Biden Administration’s Engagement in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt Energy Deals,” February 1, 2022.

⁷¹ U.S. Embassy in Jordan, Secretary of State Blinken’s Meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II, May 26, 2021.

⁷² U.S. Department of State, U.S. Security Cooperation with Jordan, Fact Sheet, May 21, 2021.

⁷³ The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2018 (P.L. 115-91) authorized \$143 million in Air Force construction funds to expand the ramp space at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base.

one report, “satellite imagery shows it has hosted US Air Force (USAF) unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and fast jets since at least 2016.”⁷⁴

As of December 2021, approximately 3,147 United States military personnel are deployed to Jordan to “counter-ISIS operations, enhance Jordan’s security, and promote regional stability.”⁷⁵ According to the 2021 agreement

Jordan shall provide unimpeded access to and use of Agreed Facilities and Areas to U.S. forces, U.S. personnel, U.S. contractors, and others as mutually agreed, for activities including-visits; training; exercises; maneuvers; transit; support and related activities; refueling of aircraft; landing and recovery of aircraft; bunkering of vessels; temporary maintenance of vehicles, vessels, and aircraft; accommodation of personnel; communications; staging and deploying of forces and materiel; pre-positioning of equipment, supplies, and materiel; security assistance and cooperation activities; joint and combined training activities; humanitarian and disaster relief; contingency operations; and other activities as mutually agreed by the Parties or their Executive Agents.⁷⁶

Beyond the need to use Jordanian facilities to counter IS throughout the region, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) may seek to partner more closely with Jordan in order to position U.S. materiel to counter Iran. In summer 2021, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that equipment and materiel previously stored at a now-closed U.S. base in Qatar would be moved to Jordan.⁷⁷

The Case of Ahlam al Tamimi

Ahlam al Tamimi is a Jordanian national who participated in the 2001 suicide bombing of a Jerusalem pizza restaurant that killed 15 people, including two Americans. In Israel, she had been sentenced to life in prison but was released and returned to Jordan in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas. The U.S. Justice Department filed criminal charges against Al Tamimi in 2013, and those charges were unsealed in early 2017. Al Tamimi is on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Most Wanted Terrorist List.⁷⁸ The United States and Jordan have an extradition treaty, which, according to the U.S. State Department, entered into force on July 29, 1995.⁷⁹ The United States requested Al Tamimi’s extradition in 2017, but Jordan’s Court of Cassation ruled that the extradition treaty was invalid. In November 2019, the State Department said that “the United States regards the extradition treaty as valid.”

According to one April 2021 report, one reason why the U.S. and Israeli governments have not applied further pressure on the government of Jordan to extradite Tamimi is concern for the stability of Jordan.⁸⁰ One unnamed U.S. State Department official noted that “while [King]

⁷⁴ “Jeremy Binnie, “US Carrying out Major Upgrade to Jordanian Airbase,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, December 1, 2021.

⁷⁵ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Text of a Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the War Powers Report, December 7, 2021.

⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, Treaties and Other International Acts Series 21-317, Agreement between the United States of America and Jordan with Exchange of Notes, Signed at Amman January 31, 2021, Entered into force March 17, 2021.

⁷⁷ J.P. Lawrence, “US Military Shifts Army Basing from Qatar to Jordan in Move that Could Provide Leverage against Iran,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 1, 2021.

⁷⁸ https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/ahlam-ahmad-al-tamimi/@@download.pdf.

The kingdom’s courts have ruled that Al Tamimi cannot be extradited until such a treaty is endorsed by the Jordanian parliament.

⁸⁰ Yonah Jeremy Bob, “Justice Ignored,” *Jerusalem Post*, April 30, 2021.

Abdullah has no love for Tamimi, giving her up to America would put the king in a very difficult position with his own people.”⁸¹ On March 23, 2022, six lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Blinken requesting responses to questions over why Jordan has not extradited Tamimi.⁸²

U.S. Foreign Assistance to Jordan

The United States has provided economic and military aid to Jordan since 1951 and 1957, respectively. Total bilateral U.S. aid (overseen by the Departments of State and Defense) to Jordan through FY2019 amounted to approximately \$23.8 billion. Jordan also has received over \$1.5 billion in additional military aid since FY2015, channeled through the Defense Department’s various security assistance accounts. For FY2023, the Biden Administration is requesting \$1.45 billion in total bilateral assistance, which would make Jordan, after Israel, the second-largest targeted recipient of annual U.S. foreign aid in the President’s congressional budget justification.

Table 1. Bilateral Aid to Jordan

(in millions of current dollars)

	FY2018 actual	FY2019 actual	FY2020 actual	FY2021 actual	FY2022 enacted	FY2023 request
DA	—	—	—	85.00	—	—
ESF	1,082.40	1,082.40	1,082.40	1,122.40	1,207.40	1,035.80
FMF	425.00	425.00	425.00	425.00	425.00	400.00
IMET	4.01	3.99	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.80
NADR	13.60	13.60	13.60	13.60	13.60	10.40
Total	1,525.01	1,524.99	1,525.00	1,650.00	1,650.00	1,450.00

Sources: Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Congressional Budget Justifications (FY2020-FY2023), P.L. 117-103, and CRS calculations and rounding.

Notes: Prior-year funds not included in this table: \$125 million in ESF in FY2020 (P.L. 116-93); \$50 million in Relief and Recovery Fund (RRF) aid in FY2019 (P.L. 116-6).

U.S.-Jordanian Agreement on Foreign Assistance

On February 14, 2018, the United States and Jordan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on U.S. foreign assistance to Jordan. The MOU, the third such agreement between the United States and Jordan, commits the United States to providing \$1.275 billion per year in bilateral foreign assistance over a five-year period for a total of \$6.375 billion (FY2018-FY2022).⁸³ This latest MOU represents a 27% increase in the U.S. commitment to Jordan above the previous iteration and is the first five-year MOU with the kingdom. The previous two MOU agreements had each been in effect for three years.

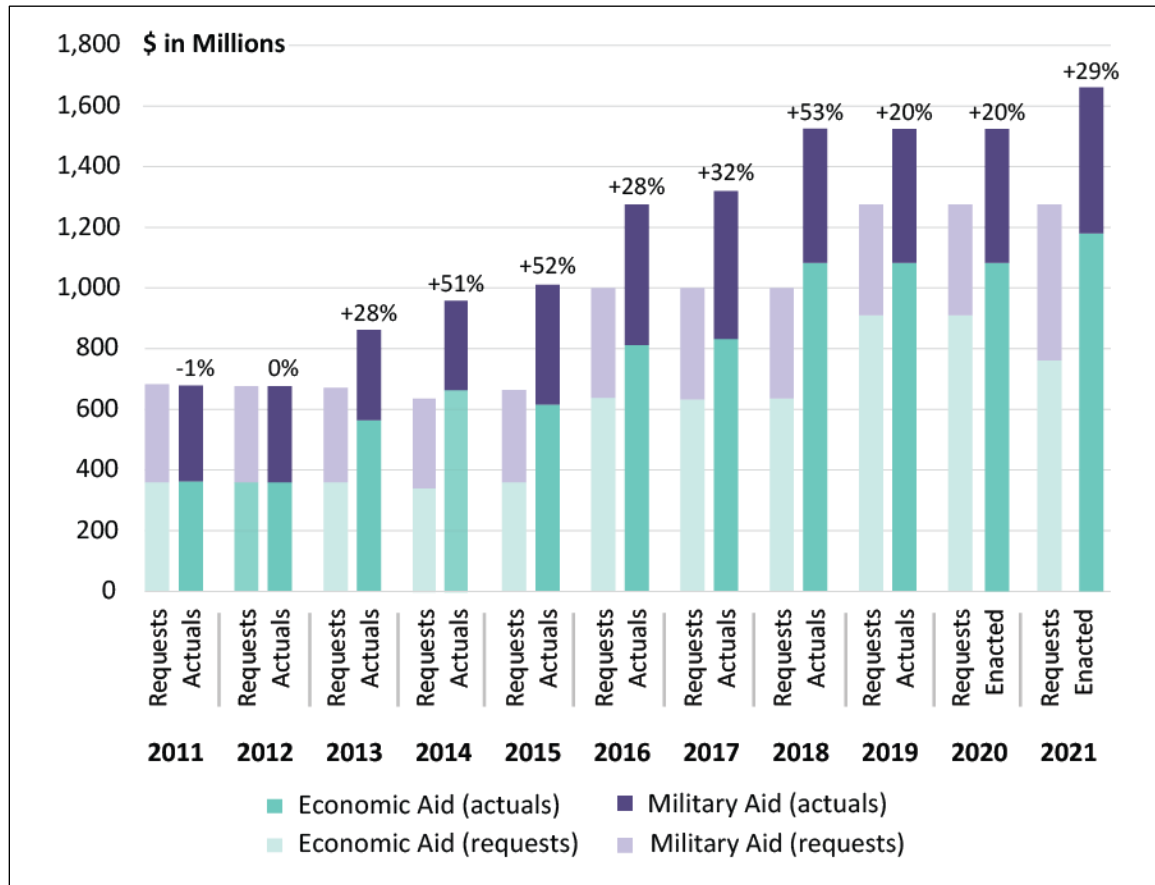
As FY2023 approaches, the Biden Administration and Jordan are negotiating a new five-year MOU on assistance. Given the economic and environmental challenges the kingdom faces, both sides may be discussing ways to incentivize reform as well as how to best allocate U.S. economic aid between USAID projects and budget support.

⁸¹ Op. cit.

⁸² Twitter, Congressman Greg Steube, March 24, 2022.

⁸³ Previous MOUs spanned FYs 2010-2014 and FYs 2015-2017.

Figure 6. State Department and USAID Assistance to Jordan, FY2011-FY2021
(Executive branch requests vs. actual allocations in millions of current dollars)



Sources: Created by CRS using data from annual State Department Congressional Budget Justifications, legislation, and explanatory statements.

Notes: Economic aid from the following accounts: Economic Support Fund (ESF), and Food for Peace Act, Title II (P.L. 480). Military aid from the following accounts: Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), and Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR).

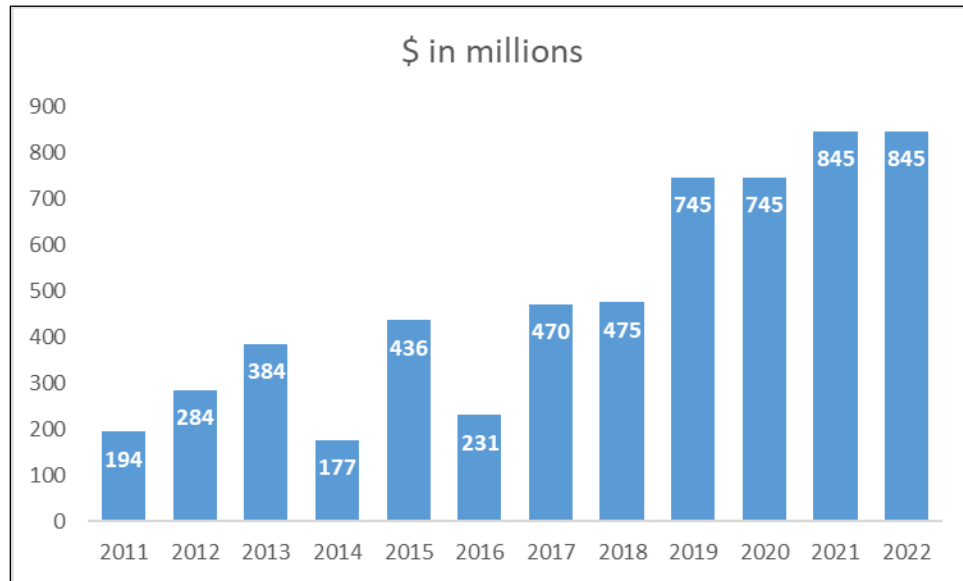
Economic Assistance

The United States provides economic aid to Jordan for (1) budgetary support (cash transfer), (2) USAID programs in Jordan, and (3) loan guarantees. The cash transfer portion of U.S. economic assistance to Jordan is the largest amount of budget support given to any U.S. foreign aid recipient worldwide.⁸⁴ U.S. cash assistance is provided to help the kingdom with foreign debt payments, Syrian refugee support, and fuel import costs. (Jordan is almost entirely reliant on imports for its domestic energy needs.) According to USAID, ESF cash transfer funds are deposited in a single tranche into a U.S.-domiciled interest-bearing account and are not commingled with other funds.⁸⁵ U.S. budget support (excluding military aid) to Jordan represents 6% of the kingdom's entire annual budget (\$15 billion for 2022).

⁸⁴ Other budget support aid recipients include the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau.

⁸⁵ USAID Congressional Notification, May 15, 2020.

Figure 7. U.S. Cash Transfers to Jordan
(Obligated funds since 2011 in millions of dollars)



Source: Created by CRS with data from USAID Foreign Aid Explorer.

USAID programs in Jordan focus on a variety of sectors, including democracy assistance, water conservation, decentralization, health, and education (particularly building and renovating public schools).

- In the **democracy** sector, U.S. assistance has supported capacity-building programs for the parliament's support offices, the Jordanian Judicial Council, the Jordan Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission, and the Ministry of Justice. The International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute also have received U.S. grants to train, among other groups, the Jordanian Independent Election Commission (IEC),⁸⁶ Jordanian political parties, and members of parliament.
- In the **water** sector, the bulk of U.S. economic assistance is devoted to optimizing the management of scarce water resources. USAID helps improve the capacity of the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, as well as local water utilities, such as Miyahuna, Aqaba Water Company, the Yarmouk Water Companies, the Water Authority of Jordan, and the Jordan Valley Authority.
- In the area of **decentralization**, Chemonics International is USAID's primary U.S. partner in implementing the Cities Implementing Transparent, Innovative, and Effective Solutions (CITIES) project, which aims to improve how Jordanian municipalities deliver core services.⁸⁷ USAID also uses ESF to fund infrastructure development in Jordanian municipalities in order to help create jobs for Syrian refugees and Jordanians.

⁸⁶ USAID also has provided grant assistance to the IEC to improve the transparency of elections administration.

⁸⁷ Chemonics International, Strengthening Municipal Governance in Jordan, at <https://chemonics.com/projects/strengthening-municipal-governance-jordan/>.

- In the **health** sector, USAID grants support the Jordanian Ministry of Health in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, in conjunction with implementing partners, such as Family Health International (FHI), Management Systems International (MSI), and Abt Associates, USAID provides funding to deliver improved reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and child health services.⁸⁸
- In the **education** sector, USAID has supported the Jordan Compact Education Fund, a multi-donor funding mechanism that has enabled 134,121 Syrian children to enroll in Jordanian schools.⁸⁹

U.S. Sovereign Loan Guarantees (or LGs) allow recipient governments (in this case, Jordan) to issue debt securities that are fully guaranteed by the United States government in capital markets,⁹⁰ effectively subsidizing the cost for governments of accessing financing. Since 2013, Congress has authorized⁹¹ LGs for Jordan and appropriated \$413 million in ESF (the “subsidy cost”) to support three separate tranches, enabling Jordan to borrow a total of \$3.75 billion at concessional lending rates.⁹²

Humanitarian Assistance for Syrian Refugees in Jordan

The U.S. State Department estimates that, since large-scale U.S. aid to Syrian refugees began in FY2012, it has allocated nearly \$2 billion in humanitarian assistance from global accounts for programs in Jordan to meet the needs of Syrian refugees and, indirectly, to ease the burden on Jordan.⁹³ U.S. humanitarian assistance is provided both as cash assistance to refugees and through programs to meet their basic needs, such as child health care, education, water, and sanitation. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Jordan, the United States has provided \$8.4 million in aid, most of which is targeted toward Syrian refugees living in Jordan.⁹⁴

Figure 8. U.S., Jordan Sign Aid Agreement
(\$340 million assistance agreement signed May 2020)



Source: U.S. Embassy, Amman.

⁸⁸ USAID, Congressional Notification #59, FY2020—Country Narrative, December 3, 2020.

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism, 2019.

⁹⁰ “A Helping Hand,” *International Financial Law Review*, April 2014.

⁹¹ Congress initially authorized additional economic assistance to Jordan in Section 7041 of P.L. 112-74, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012. P.L. 113-6, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013, specified that such assistance should take the form of a loan guarantee. Section 1706(j) of the same act also appropriated \$30 million (from FY2011) for the initial cost of sovereign loan guarantees. Congress reauthorized loan guarantees for Jordan in Section 7034 in each of the past eight consolidated appropriations acts (FY2015-FY2022).

⁹² For the latest Loan Guarantee Agreement between the United States and Jordan, see Treaties and Other International Acts Series 15-624, Loan Guarantee Agreement between the United States of America and Jordan, Signed at Amman May 31, 2015.

⁹³ CRS Correspondence with USAID, April 2022.

⁹⁴ USAID, “State Department: Update: The United States Continues to Lead the Global Response to COVID-19,” available at <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/coronavirus/fact-sheets/may-29-2020-update-united-states-continues-lead-global-response-covid-19>.

Military Assistance

U.S.-Jordanian military cooperation is a key component in bilateral relations. U.S. military assistance is primarily directed toward enabling the Jordanian military to procure and maintain U.S.-origin conventional weapons systems. U.S. and Jordanian officials have conducted 42 meetings of the U.S.-Jordan Joint Military Commission (JMC) in which high-level officers from both countries engage in discussions on enhancing cooperation and future procurement. Annual U.S. military aid represents at least 20% of Jordan's total military defense budget.⁹⁵ According to the State Department, Jordan receives one of the largest allocations of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding worldwide, and IMET graduates in Jordan include "King Abdullah II, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Vice Chairman, the Air Force commander, the Special Forces commander, and numerous other commanders."⁹⁶

Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and DOD Security Assistance

FMF overseen by the State Department is designed to support the Jordanian armed forces' multiyear (usually five-year) procurement plans, while DOD-administered security assistance supports ad hoc defense systems to respond to immediate threats and other contingencies. FMF may be used to purchase new equipment (e.g., precision-guided munitions, night vision) or to sustain previous acquisitions (e.g., Blackhawk helicopters, AT-802 fixed-wing aircraft). FMF grants have enabled the Royal Jordanian Air Force to procure munitions for its F-16 fighter aircraft and a fleet of 31 UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters.⁹⁷

Figure 9. U.S.-Supplied Black Hawk Helicopters for Jordan



Source: *Jane's Defence Weekly*.

As a result of the Syrian civil war and U.S. Operation Inherent Resolve against the Islamic State, the United States has increased military aid to Jordan and channeled these increases through DOD-managed accounts. Although Jordan still receives the bulk of U.S. military aid through the

⁹⁵ According to *Jane's*, Jordan's 2022 defense budget is \$2.17 billion. See *Jane's Defence Budgets*, Jordan, April 5, 2022.

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Jordan," Fact Sheet, October 26, 2018.

⁹⁷ Gareth Jennings, "US Contracts Black Hawk for Jordan's Royal Squadron," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 21, 2020.

FMF account, Congress has authorized defense appropriations to strengthen Jordan's border security. U.S. assistance has helped finance the creation of the Jordan Border Security System, an integrated network of guard towers, surveillance cameras, and radar to guard the kingdom's borders with Syria and Iraq.⁹⁸ Since FY2015, total DOD security cooperation funding for Jordan has amounted to at least \$1.5 billion dollars.⁹⁹

In December 2021, the United States Air Force, under C-130 Ramp-to-Ramp (R2R) transfer program, donated three C-130 transport aircraft to the Royal Jordanian Air Force. According to the U.S. Embassy in Amman, Jordan, "The transfer of the USAF C-130 aircraft boosts RJAF fixed wing tactical airlift capability by nearly 50% and saves RJAF approximately \$30 million in equipment renovation costs."¹⁰⁰

In February 2022, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) notified Congress of a potential F-16 sale to Jordan estimated at \$4.21 billion.¹⁰¹ The sale includes the transfer of new planes to Jordan, including twelve F-16 C Block 70 aircraft and four F-16 D Block 70 aircraft. It also includes weapons systems to arm the fighters and engines and other parts to refurbish older F-16 models currently maintained by the Royal Jordanian Air Force. It is unclear whether the Biden Administration has granted Jordan the ability to finance the purchase over multiple years, which may be necessary given the cost of the proposed sale.¹⁰²

Excess Defense Articles

In 1996, the United States granted Jordan Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status, a designation that, among other things, makes Jordan eligible to receive excess U.S. defense articles, training, and loans of equipment for cooperative research and development.¹⁰³ In the past decade, the United States has provided \$83.3 million (current \$ value) in excess U.S. defense articles to Jordan, including three AH-1 Cobra Helicopters, 45 Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs), and M577A3 Tracked Command Post Carriers.¹⁰⁴

Table 2. U.S. Foreign Aid Obligations to Jordan: 1946-2019

(in millions of current dollars)

Total Economic Assistance	Total Military Assistance	Total
\$15,110.700	\$8,748.900	\$23,859.600

Source: USAID Overseas Loans and Grants, July 1, 1945-September 30, 2019.

⁹⁸ According to the U.S. State Department, "The United States has supported the Jordan Border Security Program, an integrated border security surveillance, detection, and interdiction system along 350 miles of Jordan's land borders since 2009, at a cost of over \$234 million." See, U.S. State Department, U.S. Security Cooperation with Jordan, Fact Sheet, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, May 21, 2021.

⁹⁹ DOD congressional notifications to Congress.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy in Jordan, United States Air Force Transfers Three C-130 Aircraft to Royal Jordanian Air Force, December 9, 2021.

¹⁰¹ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Transmittal No. 22-06, February 3, 2022.

¹⁰² Section 23 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. §276351) authorizes the President to finance the "procurement of defense articles, defense services, and design and construction services by friendly foreign countries and international organizations, on such terms and conditions as he may determine consistent with the requirements of this section."

¹⁰³ See Designation of Jordan As Major Non-NATO Ally, Determination of President of the United States, No. 97-4, November 12, 1996, 61 F.R. 59809.

¹⁰⁴ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, EDA DataBase Tool, accessed April 2022.

Author Information

Jeremy M. Sharp
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.