

# MEJ MS 7109

## **A Political Economy History of Jordan's Intelligence Directorate: Authoritarian State**

### **Building and Fiscal Crisis**

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### **Introduction**

In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan today, there is no more powerful political actor than the regime's intelligence arm, the General Intelligence Directorate (GID). The monarchy it is tasked to protect has arguably been one of Washington's most critical assets in the Arab world since the 1970s. Consequently, many in the US foreign policy community view the GID, along with the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF), as one of America's most important partners in US regional policies, particularly the so-called war on terrorism. Observers commonly couple these accolades with the trope—apparently perennial—that the Jordanian monarchy is “on the brink” or “weathering the storm” to survive. Much of what has been written about Jordan's secret police is colored by these assumptions and commitments.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Shane Harris, “The Mouse That Roars,” *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2014; David Ignatius, “Jordan's Ex-spy Chief Wasn't Too Good to Be True,” *Washington Post*, December 13, 2009; Bruce Tefft, “Clandestine Ties to Jordan Aid CIA Operations in the Middle East,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2005; Joby Warrick, “Jordan Emerges as Key CIA Counter-terrorism Ally,” *Washington Post*, January 4, 2010. The 2008 Hollywood film *Body of Lies* was based on the similarly titled book by David Ignatius, who researched Jordan and the GID for the story.

One of the most successful authors writing in this genre is Joby Warrick, a *Washington Post* correspondent who won a Pulitzer Prize for his 2015 book, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*.<sup>2</sup> Warrick's books<sup>3</sup> and similar academic accounts narrate the rise of violent substate actors in Iraq and Syria primarily through the lives and ideologies of infamous individuals, many linked to Jordan.<sup>4</sup> From this vantage, Jordan's security officials valiantly thwart plot after plot, protecting not just the Hashemite monarchy but America's interests as well. In such narratives the GID rivals Israel's Mossad as "the best intelligence service in the Middle East," thanks to Jordanians' native cunning. As Warrick put it in *Black Flags*, "The skills essential for solving such a case were the ones that the Jordanians already possessed, in abundance. In the gritty art of human intelligence gathering, they were wired in a way that Americans, for all their money and technical wizardry, were not."<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials echo this best-in-the-region motif by praising GID interrogators as "knowing his [the captive's] language, his culture, his associates—and more about the network he belongs to."<sup>6</sup>

It is hard to underestimate the influence of these accounts both inside and outside the Beltway. Many US military and diplomatic personnel deploying to Jordan arrive with an established narrative of the pro-American monarchy and its security services battling the bad guys.<sup>7</sup> Popular entertainment reproduces such narratives, justifying US policy in the region to the public. The 2008 Hollywood film *Body of Lies*, for instance, tells the story of a CIA agent—played by Leonardo DiCaprio—whose only true ally in the struggle against extremism is the

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<sup>2</sup> Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of Isis* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See also, *The Triple Agent: The al-Qaeda Mole Who Infiltrated the CIA* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ronen Yitzhak, "The War against Terrorism and for Stability of the Hashemite Regime: Jordanian Intelligence Challenges in the Twenty-First Century," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 29, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Warrick, *Black Flags*, 142.

<sup>6</sup> Ken Silverstein, "US, Jordan Forge Closer Ties in Covert War on Terrorism," *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> The author has participated in many unclassified lectures to US government personnel since the early 2000s.

head of the GID.<sup>8</sup> This blend of policy and mythmaking succeeds in detaching Jordan's security institutions from the country's history, society, and political economy. Isolating the GID and focusing on its role as foil to al-Qa'ida, ISIS, and other such groups obscures the important, long-lasting effects of the institution's function as monarchical protector. Dominant journalistic and scholarly accounts also commonly elide the central historical role that US patronage and guidance played in Jordan: in fact, among America's post-World War II clients, the GID's uninterrupted alignment with US regional interests, stretching from the Cold War through to the war on terror, is unique. Rarely do these accounts consider that many Jordanians may not share US interests or regard the threats the GID claims to thwart as credible.<sup>9</sup>

This article builds a critical political economy history of the monarchy's intelligence apparatus beyond the security issues narrowly defined by elites in Amman and Washington. It explores the origins of the GID in the late 1960s and its transformations during the 1970s, institutional shifts linked to domestic conditions and US guidance. This crucial period helps explain the comparatively lower levels of violence the GID subsequently wielded against Jordanians.<sup>10</sup> Of equal importance are the less disclosed costs of the rise of the GID. Analysis of the post-1980 period positions Jordan's security services as an institutional and political economy actor contributing to the state's long-running fiscal crisis, which has impoverished large parts of Jordanian society. In addition, the GID's penetration and domination of the public sector have arguably degraded state capacities as much or more than simplistic references to social connections or "wasta," which observers casually invoke to explain problems in the

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<sup>8</sup> This film is quite similar to *Black Sunday*, a 1977 Hollywood classic on terrorism and America in which an Israeli Mossad agent uncovers a plot to attack the Super Bowl and saves the day. Also see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Ian Black, "Jihad Versus the Knights of Justice: Inside Jordan's War on al-Qaida," *Guardian*, February 7, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> As will be noted, however, the GID's use of violence and intimidation during the 1970s was widespread.

country. Fiscal decline and an enfeebled public sector have, not surprisingly, yielded increased poverty, unemployment, educational inequality, and socioeconomic stagnation for most of Jordanian society. Jordanians have responded to these conditions with protest and revolt despite the stereotype of Jordan's absence from the 2011 regional uprisings. The case of Jordan demonstrates that fixation on security or regional war in isolation from political economies of state and society obscures more than it reveals.

To be sure, the political sensitivity of the subject matter at hand combined with the difficulty of primary-source research means the present effort is preliminary. The last book written on Jordan's armed forces came out in 1975,<sup>11</sup> and the country's intelligence directorate is effectively unavailable to scholars interested in domestic politics. Relatedly, much of the twentieth-century scholarship on war in the Middle East operates at the level of diplomacy and high politics. Following 9/11, scholarship has been dominated by analyses of substate actors and government counterinsurgency policies, and so is dependent on what such groups and states publicly profess. Nevertheless, there is a small but growing critical literature on the intersection of war, militaries, and state building in the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> Rather than viewing war and security institutions as exogenously oriented, this article understands war and security-related mobilizations to be endogenous "social and political processes."<sup>13</sup> A political economy account

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<sup>11</sup> Syed Ali El-Edroos, *The Hashemite Arab Army, 1908–1979: An Appreciation and Analysis of Military Operations* (Amman: The Pub. Committee, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Steven Heydemann, ed., *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Luis Martínez, *The Algerian Civil War, 1990–1998* (New York: Columbia University Press; Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, 2000); Rolf Schwarz, *War and State Building in the Middle East* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Elke Grawert and Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Businessmen in Arm: How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the Mena Region* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Tariq Tell, "Early Spring in Jordan: The Revolt of the Military Veterans" (Carnegie Middle East Center, Renegotiating Civil-Military Relations in Arab States: Political and Economic Grievances in Transition Project, November 4, 2015), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/ACMR\\_Tell\\_Jordan\\_Eng\\_final.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/ACMR_Tell_Jordan_Eng_final.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Steven Heydemann, "War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East," in Heydemann, *War, Institutions, and Social Change*, 3.

of the GID in this manner widens the lens from a proximate focus on monarchical survival to a broader perspective that accounts for the development of a longer historical crisis. Such an approach also problematizes the assumption that the GID stands apart from the threats it ostensibly subdues. The argument and conclusion of this article are certainly only a first step toward a more critical understanding of the GID and its relationship to the formation of the Jordanian state. Yet breaking new ground sometimes requires looking where the light does not shine.

### **From Coup-Proofing to Civil War: The Origins of the GID**

Social scientists studying authoritarian rule have long recognized the importance of coercive institutions such as armies, national guards, the police, and intelligence agencies. However, many scholars have discussed such institutions collectively and thus do not examine how the particular origins of an institution differentiate it and influence the shape of future authoritarian rule. Breaking new ground in this regard is Sheena Chestnut Greitens's recent study *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence*, which compares the origins of secret police institutions across East Asia. In her approach to the origins of a country's intelligence apparatus, Greitens distinguishes between the various internal threats autocrats face in attempting to maintain power. She posits a trade-off, or "coercive dilemma," that rulers face when constructing a secret police institution, namely whether it aims to thwart a popular movement or elite threats. As she explains the difference, "Coup-proofing calls for an internally fragmented and socially exclusive security force, while managing popular unrest requires a unitary apparatus with broadly embedded, socially inclusive intelligence networks."<sup>14</sup> For

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<sup>14</sup> Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11.

Greitens, this distinction explains the subsequent levels and types of violence that the secret police wield to maintain authoritarian rule. For example, coup-proofing guided the establishment of overlapping and competing security organizations in Iraq and Syria. The result was a history of capricious violence against elites and popular sectors. By contrast today, Jordan's GID resembles a more unitary actor with virtually no rivals and a record, at least since the 1980s, of less arbitrary and widespread violence than its two neighbors. This distinction is important, but it is not sufficient. The origins of the GID and its evolution were historically conditioned in ways different from Greitens's model, differences that have influenced Jordanian political and economic development beyond patterns of violence. What originated as a tool to thwart elite coups consolidated into an instrument aimed at popular political oppositions.

Publicly available records of the origins of the GID are sparse, and most sources are official accounts of the institution not sufficient for understanding its broader context.<sup>15</sup> What is known resembles part monarchal scheme and part imperial intrigue. Though the directorate was legislatively enacted in 1964 with a mandate to protect the state, Tariq Tell and Joseph Massad each trace its roots to an earlier appendage of the army's military intelligence. From the British introduction of Hashemite rule in the 1920s through the tumultuous 1970s, the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) had been the institutional core of the Jordanian state. Early Israeli observers of Jordan liked to quip that "in Jordan an army owns a state," while Tell argues that "war built the Jordanian state."<sup>16</sup> King Hussein's ascension to power in the 1950s and 1960s was marked by revelations of attempted coups initiated within the JAF leadership. While official biographers of

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<sup>15</sup> Aside from popular and policy publications, some of the earliest accounts come from Palestinian sources in the 1970s.

<sup>16</sup> P. J. Vatikiotis, *Politics and the Military in Jordan: A Study of the Arab Legion, 1921–1957* (London: Cass, 1967), 5; Tariq M. Tell, "Guns, Gold, and Grain: War and Food Supply in the Making of TransJordan," in Heydemann, *War, Institutions and Social Change*, 33.

the monarchy have taken these attempts at face value—sometimes deploying them to embellish the courage and skill of the young king—historians have argued for a more nuanced understanding of the 1950s unrest, which, they show, was less threatening to the king than his biographers portray.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, it was in the context of the unrest of the late 1950s that JAF lawyer Muhammad Rasul al-Kilani, who would later be appointed the GID’s first head, gained notoriety for his interrogation of some of the coup plotters.<sup>18</sup> CIA officer Jack O’Connell, who first came to Amman in 1958 and later served as chief of station from 1963 to 1971, took credit for cultivating al-Kilani, whom he described as looking and acting like “Rasputin.”<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, it was in the late 1950s that the CIA concluded that King Hussein was a loyal ally against the Soviets and began making direct monthly cash payments to him, funds separate from official US budgetary and military aid.<sup>20</sup> During the 1970s Senate Church Committee investigations into CIA misconduct, the existence of such payments and even the provision of prostitutes leaked to the press. The CIA waffled on the prostitution charge, admitting to paying for the king’s companions—arranged through an assistant to the billionaire Howard Hughes—but countering that the women could have been “mere conversationalists.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there was staunch defense of the payments in later years. In his memoirs, O’Connell argues the payments were not bribes nor were they for the king’s personal use. Rather, he asserts, they were for King Hussein to fund his own intelligence network distinct from military intelligence, albeit

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Tal, *Politics, the Military and National Security in Jordan, 1955–1967* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 38–53; Tariq Tell, *The Social and Economic Origins of Monarchy in Jordan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 121.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph A. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 202.

<sup>19</sup> Jack O’Connell and Vernon Loeb, *King’s Counsel: A Memoir of War, Espionage, and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2011), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Little, “A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer? The United States, King Hussein, and Jordan, 1953–1970,” *International History Review* 17, no. 3 (1995).

<sup>21</sup> *Washington Post* (Parade), March 28, 1976, cited in declassified CIA documents, (CIA-RDP90-01208R000100210016-3), CIA CREST: 25-Year Program archive.

staffed by select former JAF officers.<sup>22</sup> In response to the leaks, the Carter administration ended the monthly payments. However, by the 1980s, the CIA had upgraded its support for the intelligence agency to a classified annual budget. According to former CIA official Michael Scheuer, “It’s not a huge sum of money to us, but it’s a significant amount of money for [the GID].”<sup>23</sup> Decades after the monthly payments, former head of the CIA George Tenet in an interview with Bob Woodward could claim with little hyperbole that “we created the GID.” In line with Greitens’s analysis, therefore, the monarchy and the CIA created the initial GID as a coup-proofing institution to counter perceived threats coming from the JAF leadership. Nevertheless, creation is one thing, and consolidation as an independent power center is another. It was the Jordanian civil war in 1970–71 that propelled the GID out from under the JAF’s shadow and into a new institutional and political role.

### **The 1970s Transformation**

At dawn on September 17, 1970, two JAF divisions, supported by a newly formed paramilitary division, launched what became known as the Battle of Amman.<sup>24</sup> Factions of Palestinian fedayeen had held sway over the country’s major urban areas for over a year, but during the fight, the JAF far outgunned and outmanned the urban guerillas. Furthermore, three days later the JAF routed a confused and unsupported Syrian military intervention near the town of Ramtha.<sup>25</sup> The civil war was far more than a military contest: it was an existential political threat to the monarchy.<sup>26</sup> The Palestinian guerillas and their supporters were, in the terms of the day, a

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<sup>22</sup> O’Connell and Loeb, *King’s Counsel*, 136–37.

<sup>23</sup> Silverstein, “US, Jordan Forge Closer Ties.”

<sup>24</sup> Neville Brown, “Jordanian Civil War,” *Military Review* (September 1971): 41.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, “Jordanian Civil War,” 44–45; El-Edroos, *Hashemite Arab Army*, 455–56.

<sup>26</sup> Sheila Ryan and Joe Stork, “The Thrice-Rescued Throne,” *MERIP Reports* 7 (February 1972).



“state within a state.” By the time fighting broke out, Palestinian organizations had taken over municipal services, some government ministries, and their police and adjudication units had displaced Hashemite personnel in the major cities. For many of Jordan’s civilian population, the more radical Palestinian elements did prove to be unpopular and excessive, but the case was different for Yasir Arafat’s Fatah movement.<sup>27</sup> In the years leading up to the showdown, Fatah organizations had come to dominate popular elections for the country’s professional associations. The most telling example of Fatah dominance was just two days before the outbreak of fighting in September when a Fatah list of candidates competed in the executive board elections of the country’s most monarchically loyal association, the Amman Chamber of Commerce.<sup>28</sup> These political challenges were compounded by the fact that the civil war did not neatly divide citizens of Palestinian origin versus those of East Bank origin. Many of the former took no part and some of the latter went over to the rebels, including some JAF units and their officers.

Younger Jordanians today have little understanding of the civil war because the period is “excluded from educational curricula.”<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it is hard to overstate how sensitive of a subject the fighting and its aftermath remain. For example, the war museum known as the Sarh al-Shahid (Martyrs Memorial) that King Hussein opened in Amman in 1977 made no reference to what is the country’s second-longest—and bloodiest—war. Consensus estimates of total deaths from the September fighting range from 3,000 to 5,000. The Jordanian army admitted to over 600 dead soldiers with 1,500 wounded, compared to an estimated 700 dead and 6,000 wounded in fighting the Israeli army in 1967.<sup>30</sup> The greatest losses were to civilians, estimated

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<sup>27</sup> Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 244.

<sup>28</sup> Pete W. Moore, *Doing Business in the Middle East: Politics and Economic Crisis in Jordan and Kuwait* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101.

<sup>29</sup> Mahmoud M. Naamneh, “Memories of Clashes, Clashes of Memories: The 1970 Events and the Making of National Identity in Jordan,” *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 4, no. 2 (2017): 61.

<sup>30</sup> El-Edroos, *Hashemite Arab Army*, 459, 30.

between 1,500 and 3,500, mostly within Amman.<sup>31</sup> Despite a major restoration of the museum in 2016 to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the Great Arab Revolt, there remains no mention of 1970. Also historically sensitive is the extent of CIA involvement in the civil war.

Scholarly work on this crucial period in Jordanian history has lagged. Much of what exists focuses on the military maneuvers or diplomatic turning points, with a significant amount of this work relying on official accounts.<sup>32</sup> Available diplomatic records do show that the Nixon administration as well as Israeli officials considered military contingencies to support King Hussein during the fighting. Records of actual, if any, US support remain classified. It is in Palestinian accounts and sources that one finds specific references to the Hashemite regime's intelligence practices during the period. These claim the monarchy created something of a psychological warfare unit within the JAF known as al-Shu'ba al-Khassa (the Special Branch) to sow division among the Palestinian factions and turn the urban populations against the fedayeen. Palestinian forces at the time specifically accused former US Ambassador Harrison M. Symmes, who headed a special task force on Jordan at the State Department, of supporting the new organization.<sup>33</sup> The Special Branch was distinct from the GID, since at the time the regime believed that the GID had been penetrated by Palestinian agents.<sup>34</sup> CIA station chief O'Connell derisively recounted that the head of the GID, Mudar Badran, withered during the September 1970 fighting and removed directorate records in anticipation of a fedayeen victory.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, since at least 1969 JAF officers in the Special Branch had been setting up intelligence

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<sup>31</sup> Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 267.

<sup>32</sup> Naamneh, "Memories of Clashes," 57. The fighting in 1970 has entered the social science literature as part of larger debates about civil wars. See the special issue of *Civil Wars*, vol. 10, no. 3 (September 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Press report cited in declassified CIA documents, (CIA-RDP88-01350R000200840012-9), CIA CREST: 25-Year Program archive.

<sup>34</sup> These suspicions were later revealed to Palestinian sources by former Special Branch members. See Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 245.

<sup>35</sup> O'Connell and Loeb, *King's Counsel*, 98.

networks in refugee camps, recruiting agents, running false flag operations, and planning assassinations.<sup>36</sup> This institutional role was completely new for the JAF, and it is reasonable to assume the Special Branch had some help. After all the CIA was committed to the protection of the monarchy, and its officers had ample experience in Southeast Asia setting up parallel military organizations that ran psychological and assassination programs.<sup>37</sup> That one of the few demands fractious Palestinian representatives could consistently agree upon was for the monarchy to disband the Special Branch suggests its operations were successful.<sup>38</sup>

The end of combat in July 1971 posed a dilemma for the monarchy. While the military contest was over, the job of purging perceived fedayeen sympathizers and remnants remained. The JAF had never sustained such operations in its history, and some US military advisers believed that the JAF's military intelligence would not be up to the task.<sup>39</sup> Transiting from psychological warfare and military combat operations to domestic spying and purging operations could put the JAF in a more challenging institutional position than from its previous garrisoning and border operations.

Making the dilemma more acute for King Hussein was the 1974 "mutiny" of the JAF's most elite combat unit. There had been rumors since the 1967 War of discontent within the JAF ranks, but the situation came to a head after its victory in the civil war. According to declassified CIA documents, officers and enlisted men in the Fortieth Armored Brigade in Zarqa "threatened to march on Amman" if their long-standing grievances about low pay and rising commodity prices were not met.<sup>40</sup> The time was right for less demand, not more, to be put on the armed

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<sup>36</sup> Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 245.

<sup>37</sup> One of the most infamous was the Phoenix Program, which ran from 1965 to 1972.

<sup>38</sup> Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 252–53.

<sup>39</sup> Retired US Defense Intelligence Agency officer active in the region in the 1970s and 1980s, interview, Washington, DC, November 2004.

<sup>40</sup> White House Situation Room Message, "Mutiny of Armored Brigade in Jordan," February 3, 1974, (CIA-RDP78S01932A000100020063-7), CIA CREST: 25-Year Program archive.

forces. Consequently, the nasty task of completing the victory was turned over to the GID. The organization grew to accommodate the new realities and in the process evolved into something more than a coup-proofing institution.

In the years after the civil war, some Jordanians came to view the GID positively through a nationalistic lens,<sup>41</sup> while others caustically referred to the GID's main detention center in the Shmeisani area of Amman as "hotel Palestine" or "the fingernail factory."<sup>42</sup> These years featured the highest and most widespread violence wielded by the GID against its own society. GID officers encouraged Jordanians to inform on their neighbors, rewarding some with significant benefits. Whereas the JAF rounded up and detained somewhere between 16,000 to 20,000 Palestinians during the 1970–71 fighting, the GID would go on to imprison and torture thousands more throughout the decade. The purging of the 1970s, and the GID's centrality to that process, wrought two lasting political effects.

First, GID operations not only apprehended fedayeen loyalists but resulted in a general removal of citizens of Palestinian origin from most parts of the state bureaucracy. Palestinian presence in the JAF, which had historically been limited to service in noncombat units, was largely eliminated. Moreover, there was a rapid expansion of employment in government ministries throughout the 1970s, with total public employment reaching nearly 50 percent of the labor force by the 1980s. This expansion afforded the GID a powerful tool. Often this period in Jordanian history is framed as its "semi-rentier phase" in which increased Gulf oil rents to the Jordanian state translated into increased public spending.<sup>43</sup> However, in political terms it

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<sup>41</sup> Adnan Abu Odeh, *Jordanians, Palestinians, and the Hashemite Kingdom in the Middle East Peace Process* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), 191.

<sup>42</sup> Silverstein, "US, Jordan Forge Closer Ties."

<sup>43</sup> Rex Brynen, "Economic Crisis and Post-Rentier Democratization in the Arab World: The Case of Jordan," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 25, no. 1 (1992): 78–81.

mattered where and how that money was spent. Public and administrative expansion in the 1970s unfolded hand in hand with the GID's new roles. The directorate was able to build what Greitens termed "socially inclusive networks" within East Bank communities through strategic recruitment, but that could hardly be extended to the larger and more urban communities of Palestinian origin. To reach those parts of society, the GID exploited its embeddedness in the fabric of the public sector, using access to jobs and benefits to advance the purge and reorient Jordanian society.<sup>44</sup> This kind of parallel authority to public administration also meant that attendant gains in the 1970s in sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, and social insurance—gains which could serve broader developmental goals—could be repurposed to serve GID interests.

One of the areas where the GID's penetration of the public sector was first felt was the refugee camps. Nadya Hajj in her study of property rights in Palestinian refugee camps notes the rise of "institutionalized predation" in the immediate aftermath of 1970.<sup>45</sup> Jordanian officials present in local camp services improvement committees (CSIC) spearheaded the registration of property and businesses within the camps. On the one hand, inclusive administrative policies can help lower transaction costs, boost investment, and increase public revenue, particularly in the kind of unregulated urban refugee camps that had grown in Jordan since 1948. On the other hand, they also constitute forms of domination and surveillance and turn public goods—like property rights—into *positional* goods designed to leverage collaboration. According to one of

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<sup>44</sup> Security manipulation of some state functions preceded the post-civil war period. According to Laurie Brand, officials in the 1950s began utilizing control over exit permits as a means to punish or reward individuals. Laurie A. Brand, *Citizens Abroad: Emigration and the State in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186.

<sup>45</sup> Nadya Hajj, *Protection amid Chaos: The Creation of Property Rights in Palestinian Refugee Camps* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 78.

Hajj's informants, "In my opinion, the CSIC is mostly an agent of the government *mukhabarat* [secret police]. They collect information about us to make sure we behave properly."<sup>46</sup>

The GID's reach eventually spread far beyond the refugee camps into everyday governance to a degree that would come to rival any intelligence organization in the region. For example, ministry officials required good conduct and "political health" certificates from the GID to hire and promote civil servants. The practice even extended to parts of the private sector.<sup>47</sup> By the end of the 1970s, one of the most enduring features of Jordan's political economy had come into reality: East Bankers work for the state, and Palestinians work in the private sector. While a Palestinian merchant class was in place long before 1970, it was the GID that invested this distinction with greater political power, the legacies of which remain today.

A second effect of the purging was a shift in the GID's recruiting. The monarchy's appointment of Ahmad Obeidat—another lawyer but without a JAF background, and from Irbid rather than southern Jordan—to head the GID in 1974 signaled the inclusion and promotion of groups outside the typical JAF recruiting bastions.<sup>48</sup> The new and expanded role of the GID was accompanied by an expansion of its members and hierarchies. The cumulative effect of this 1970s expansion was that the GID came out from under the umbrella of the JAF and became an institution that needed an independent base and practice of recruitment. Consequently, the GID emerged not simply as a part of the security sector but as its own institutional and political actor. Of course, there has never been an accounting of the size of the GID or the number of its personnel. Yet it is widely acknowledged that since the late 1970s former GID heads and other

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<sup>46</sup> Hajj, *Protection amid Chaos*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Laurie A. Brand, "Liberalization and Changing Political Coalitions: The Bases of Jordan's 1990–1991 Gulf Crisis Policy," *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 4 (1991): 20–21.

<sup>48</sup> Obeidat would later serve as prime minister in the 1980s, lead the anti-normalization campaign in the 1990s, and ironically was brought on as the first head of the National Human Rights Commission.

GID members have dominated important cabinet positions and ministry posts, as well as the office of prime minister.<sup>49</sup> In other words, the GID came to represent its own corporate interest within the regime and the state bureaucracy, independent of the JAF. It was at this point one could speak of the JAF on the one hand and the GID on the other.

In summation, by the late 1970s the GID had transitioned from a coup-proofing organization into one designed to thwart popular opposition—but not quite according to Greitens’s formulation. Postwar purging of all the security organs ensured that only groups and elites from the East Bank, not urban Palestinians, would be included. The GID could intimidate and co-opt urban Palestinians through its embeddedness in the public sector, but it could not replicate its recruitment linkage to East Bank societies. In Greitens’s East Asian cases, an intelligence institution’s social inclusiveness has the effect of lowering future levels of violence. That this high degree of inclusiveness did not fully obtain in Jordan in the 1970s suggests that the subsequently lower levels of GID violence in the 1980s onward may not have hinged solely on its role in thwarting popular opposition.<sup>50</sup> It is quite possible that collective memories of the violence and fear in the 1970s worked to deter future political opposition. As Ziad Abu-Rish has argued, “The entire trajectory of state formation relied on the deployment of violence. ‘Complacency’ was not merely ‘bought off.’”<sup>51</sup> Thus, similar to how violence is deployed by organized crime, “a reputation for violence” can substitute for other means of authoritarian maintenance,<sup>52</sup> like co-optation or political exclusion.

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<sup>49</sup> Tell, “Early Spring in Jordan.”

<sup>50</sup> Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police*, 209.

<sup>51</sup> Ziad Abu-Rish, “Protests, Regime Stability, and State Formation in Jordan,” in *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East*, ed. Mehran Kamrava (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 288–89.

<sup>52</sup> Diego Gambetta, “Mafia: The Price of Distrust,” in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. Diego Gambetta (New York: Blackwell, 1988), 169.

US and Jordanian officials deemed the GID operations of the 1970s huge successes, and the timing could not have been better. While America's South Vietnamese allies suffered serial defeat in the early 1970s, the GID and its monarchy seemingly stood apart. Though a small victory in the wider landscape of the Cold War, the GID had earned its reputation for excellence in the eyes of Washington's decision makers.

### **Iraq's Battlefields and GID Political Economies**

Typical narratives of the GID in the 1980s focus on accounts of joint operations with the CIA to dismantle the Abu Nidal organization,<sup>53</sup> a splinter group of Fatah that carried out a range of military operations and attacks on civilians as part of its overall rejection of the direction the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was headed in. Yet in terms of the GID's institutional development, this campaign was a side show. Rather, it was Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Iran exactly a decade after the civil war that afforded the GID an opportunity to expand its capacities beyond the borders of the state. Jordanian forces would not engage in overt combat, but the country would become tied to the fate of Iraq's battlefields as the war radically deepened the new trade relationship that Baghdad and Amman had previously begun to build.<sup>54</sup>

With the onset of war, Baghdad became reliant on Jordan and the port of Aqaba for most of its consumer imports, feeding expansion of the Jordanian economy and boosting labor markets beyond Amman.<sup>55</sup> Cities like Zarqa, which today is regarded with suspicion as a site of "radicalization," in the 1980s featured a flourishing crafts industry to service Iraqi consumption.

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<sup>53</sup> Yitzhak, "War against Terrorism," 215.

<sup>54</sup> Laurie A. Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 209–10.

<sup>55</sup> Pete W. Moore and Christopher Parker, "The War Economy of Iraq," *Middle East Report* 243 (2007); Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations*, 206–20.



Ma'an, another "dangerous" city today, was the center of a thriving transport sector. Once the Reagan administration issued a presidential directive that Iran could not be allowed to prevail in the war, the US embrace of the GID strengthened. Nearly all of the munition needs for the Iraqi army passed through the port of Aqaba,<sup>56</sup> while US-supplied battlefield intelligence aiding Iraqi commanders passed through the GID.<sup>57</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Jordan and its security services had begun to garner broader attention within Washington's professional foreign policy community, including the Council on Foreign Relations and Beltway think tanks. Some of the attention owes to former agent O'Connell securing public relations (Deramus & Company) and lobbying (Dennis Neal & Company) representation for the Hashemites in Washington.<sup>58</sup> These firms created the Jordan Information Bureau to burnish the kingdom's image in Washington and throughout the United States. The CIA's midwifery of the GID was growing beyond its Cold War origins. The persistent fear that the monarchy could fall to communists had begun to fade somewhat. Hashemite Jordan was now pitched—in terms reminiscent of the American discourse of exceptionalism—as “one of the few counterexamples, certainly in the Middle East, of a moderate and civilized state.”<sup>59</sup> Its security services kept a “tight grip” but “the great majority of the public does not have to be controlled.”<sup>60</sup> The resident view of the Hashemites as critical to Israel's security and key to any regional peace process was reinforced. At the same time, King Hussein embarked on a major expansion of the armed forces to include several high-value purchases of American weapons systems. The top

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<sup>56</sup> Prominent Iraqi trader active in the 1980s, interview, Istanbul, May 2015. In interviews with Jordanian merchants, Jordanian importers consistently complained about delays at the port of Aqaba because of prioritized military shipments during the Iran-Iraq war.

<sup>57</sup> Retired US Defense Intelligence Agency official, interview, Washington, DC, November 2004.

<sup>58</sup> O'Connell and Loeb, *King's Carousel*, 113.

<sup>59</sup> Arthur R. Day, *East Bank/West Bank: Jordan and the Prospects for Peace* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1986), 4.

<sup>60</sup> Day, *East Bank/West Bank*, 4, 51.

leadership of the JAF began to attend the US Army's war colleges and staff schools in larger numbers, marking a break from the previous generation's reliance on British military education. Jordan quickly became one of the largest participants in the Pentagon's International Military and Training program to train allied military officers.

An important base of support for deeper security ties with Amman emerged from Washington's growing defense and professional services sector, which retired military and intelligence officials rotated in and out of.<sup>61</sup> One of the most-cited analyses of the importance of Jordan and its security services came out of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University in 1984. Social scientists Paul Jureidini and R. D. McLaurin, long linked to the US intelligence community and defense contractors through their firm Abbot Associates,<sup>62</sup> penned the widely read monograph *Jordan: The Impact of Social Change on the Role of the Tribes*. In it they deployed modernization theory to explore potential challenges to tribal networks' support of the Hashemite monarchy, "an anchor of US policy in the Middle East." Instead of resisting the potential effects of modernization on Jordan's tribal society, however, the authors advocated for the United States to deepen its support for the modernization of Jordan's security institutions.<sup>63</sup> Together, the varied efforts representing the Hashemite regime and the Jordanian state in US policy and academic circles solidified one of the most unquestioned assumptions of US policy in the Middle East: funding the GID and the JAF is necessary to protect an ally that otherwise is vulnerable to threat.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> For the growth of this "expert" industry, see Osamah F. Khalil, *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Joy Rohde, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research during the Cold War*, American Institutions and Society (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 124–25.

<sup>63</sup> Paul A. Jureidini and R. D. McLaurin, *Jordan: The Impact of Social Change on the Role of the Tribes* The Washington Papers/108, Volume XII (New York: Praeger, 1984)

<sup>64</sup> It is worth noting a similar assumption informed Britain's policy toward the monarchy before the switch to American patronage. See John Bagot Glubb, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (New York: Harper, 1957).

In 1989, a fiscal threat in the form of a full-blown debt crisis brought Jordanian society to its knees and presented the monarchy with its most acute threat since 1970. After quibbling about the extent of the debt for years, Jordanian officials were compelled to admit to figures over \$8 billion, or about 225 percent of Jordan's GDP, at least half assumed to be security/defense debts.<sup>65</sup> By the end of the previous year, the value of the Jordanian dinar against the dollar had dropped by 45 percent. In a series of moves known as "Black Mondays," the Jordanian Central Bank began withdrawing credit, precipitating a run on the dinar. After turning to the International Monetary Fund for assistance in the spring of 1989, Jordanian officials increased prices on a number of subsidized and controlled commodities.<sup>66</sup> Angry public demonstrations fueled by socioeconomic grievances, along with clashes with security forces, rocked the kingdom. The disturbances and the first civilian casualties since 1970-1971 took place in the country's south, areas where employment in the security apparatus was quite high. Not surprisingly, a delegation of World Bank officials subsequently pinpointed the state's massive expenditure on the military and security services as the driver of the fiscal crisis.<sup>67</sup>

The GID's portion of public expenditure has never been revealed, in part because it is not distinguished from overall security spending in the kingdom. As Samer Soliman has reported, historically, the different modern Arab governments have regularly produced inaccurate expenditure data,<sup>68</sup> and in the Jordanian case observers since the 1970s have held that not all Jordanian security expenditures are fully recorded (nor is all US security aid).<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>65</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report Jordan*, no. 2 (1989), 10.

<sup>66</sup> Katherine Blue Carroll, *Business As Usual? Economic Reform in Jordan* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 47-48; Brynen, "Economic Crisis and Post-Rentier Democratization," 88-90.

<sup>67</sup> World Bank, "Jordan: Public Expenditure Review," ed. Country Operations Division (Washington, DC, February 1991), 4.

<sup>68</sup> Samer Soliman, *The Autumn of Dictatorship: Fiscal Crisis and Political Change in Egypt under Mubarak* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 30-33.

<sup>69</sup> Eliyahu Kanovsky, *The Economy of Jordan: The Implications of Peace in the Middle East* (Tel Aviv: University Pub. Projects, 1976), 29-32.

even if one treats published figures as a conservative baseline, the state's massive spending on security was crowding out developmental investment and chances for upgrading the public sector. Officially reported defense spending typically ranged from 40 to over 60 percent of total public expenditure in the decade before the civil war and by 1973 accounted for 17.4 percent of gross domestic product, ranking Jordan as third highest in the world.<sup>70</sup> Into the 1980s when there was lower growth, the defense burden of the budget still hovered around 30 percent, far exceeding developmental investment, and in the aggregate sufficient to launch a major weapons modernization program and expand the ranks of the security services.<sup>71</sup> By 1990, according to World Bank data, Jordan ranked second in the world in terms of military/security employment as a percentage of the labor force, behind Iraq but ahead of North Korea and Syria.<sup>72</sup> One must also consider the fiscal burden of security spending not included or obscured in official reporting. For example, by this period the state had enhanced JAF salaries with a range of educational, health, and housing benefits Anne Marie Baylouny has termed "militarized welfare."<sup>73</sup> It is reasonable to assume GID officials enjoy similar or more robust benefits. And those perks are likely hidden from the rest of the armed forces because, owing to its divorce from the JAF in the 1970s, the GID today recruits on its own and almost never draws from other services.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Michael P. Mazur, *Economic Growth and Development in Jordan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 72; Stephen S. Kaplan, "United States Aid and Regime Maintenance on Jordan, 1957–1973," *Public Policy* 23, no. 2 (1975): 199. A complete accounting of defense spending in Jordan is not possible. Since the 1970s, Jordan reports spending on defense as a single category, disaggregating it into recurring spending and capital spending. Recurring spending includes annual salaries for the JAF and police, as well as operational costs, though it is not known whether this includes other security salaries, like the GID. Defense capital spending, however, has not been reported since the civil war but is widely assumed to include JAF weapons purchases, weapons systems servicing, and personnel pensions. In short, a great deal of security financials are hidden.

<sup>71</sup> World Bank, "Jordan: Public Expenditure Review," 44. CIA Directorate of Intelligence, "Jordan's Military Modernization: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," Office of Near East and South Asian Analysis (88-10042), July 1988.

<sup>72</sup> "Armed Forces Personnel (% of Total Labor Force)," World Bank Data website, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.TF.ZS>.

<sup>73</sup> Anne Marie Baylouny, "Militarizing Welfare: Neo-Liberalism and Jordanian Policy," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>74</sup> Jordanian security official, interview, Amman, May 2016.

The revolt in 1989 was just the first manifestation of a chronic fiscal crisis that would plague Jordan into the next century. More grievance-fueled revolts took place in the 1990s as the state-led socioeconomic advances of the 1970s became hostage to security spending and paying off older military debts. Cutting public investment, privatizing, and stretching out debt payments offered leaders a short-term means to continue the defense buildup. Declassified CIA analyses from the 1980s and 1990s show that US officials were well aware of Jordan's deleterious fiscal regime.<sup>75</sup> Royal Court officials were likewise cognizant, but there is no evidence that security sector reform or shifting investment and revenue was ever seriously considered.<sup>76</sup> The end of the Iran-Iraq war and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait did little to change these relationships. Officially, the United States rebuked King Hussein for his support of Saddam Hussein in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and military cooperation between Amman and Washington was curbed. Yet this had little effect on the ability of the CIA and GID to build "their own fiefdom" financially and operationally distinct from both the Pentagon and the State Department.<sup>77</sup> Whatever setback in relations occurred was both bracketed and short-lived. It was ultimately tactical as well: one cannot find any similar Hashemite departure from US policy since 1990.

Once the George Bush Sr. administration implemented economic sanctions against Iraq, things began to change. To get around the sanctions, Jordanian traders and their Iraqi counterparts went underground. And the GID followed. It is well known that although US officials complained about the underground trade, they largely never confronted it. Gradually,

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<sup>75</sup> CIA Directorate of Intelligence, "Jordan: Economic Recession and the Impact on Key Interest Groups: An Intelligence Assessment," NESAs (87-10057), December 1987; Intelligence Report, NESAs, "Jordan: Bread Riots Over, but Economic Problems Remain," CIAWESA (96-40153), September 5, 1996.

<sup>76</sup> There have been calls to cut the size of the JAF, however. See Alexander Bligh, "The Jordanian Army: Between Domestic and External Challenges," *Review of International Affairs* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2001). After the 1989 crisis, the monarchy floated a vague proposal for giving up some of its weapons systems in return for debt reduction, but it was never formalized; see Yahya M. Sadowski, *Scuds or Butter? The Political Economy of Arms Control in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993), 44–51.

<sup>77</sup> Retired US Defense Intelligence Agency official, interview, Washington, DC, November 2004.

however, the export and transport industries dependent on the Iraqi market began to suffer. The bite of the international sanctions on Iraq triggered an enduring political economy trend.

Whereas in the 1980s trade and finance with Baghdad was bilaterally coordinated at the ministry level, according to businessmen and sources in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in the 1990s, GID approval and supervision became the norm for larger trade and financing deals. Just as the GID became embedded in the public sector in the 1970s, so it became embedded in foreign trade. Once Iraq's offensive in Iran stalled in 1981 and then turned into retreat in 1982, capital flight from Iraq into Jordan picked up rapidly, some of it likely mediated through GID officials with financial sector links.<sup>78</sup> In 1989, Petra Bank, one of the conduits for capital flight through the kingdom and one of the country's largest banks at the time, was sequestered by Jordanian officials for criminal suspicion. In 1992, Jordanian officials convicted in absentia its former head, Ahmad Chalabi, though he would go on to forge a well-known relationship with the CIA in the years leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. These capital flows pushed up property values in the wealthy enclaves of West Amman, while other streams of Iraqi money fueled footloose investments like hotel construction and the purchase of residence visas. The boost in consumption, however, proved transitory and accrued to a narrow strata of Jordanian society, while the public sector continued to languish. Some of Amman's richest individuals with links to security officials made their fortunes in this period. Sensitivity about such developments remain, but it is very likely that the GID's gray-market activities metastasized through this period.

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<sup>78</sup> Former Iraqi minister, interview, Dubai, UAE, February 2009; former Iraqi minister, interview, Sharjah, UAE, March 2009.

## **Authoritarian Policing**

During the 1990s, GID officials matched their unconstrained business investments with an expansion of domestic political power. In reaction to the crises and revolts of 1989, King Hussein reinstated parliamentary elections and inaugurated a highly publicized liberalization of the country's politics. Restrictions on the media, political parties, and professional associations were formally eased. After the first parliamentary election returned a larger number of opposition candidates, however, the monarchy began to curb electoral competition, starting with a change in the voting rules in 1993. Completion of the unpopular Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty in 1994 triggered a period of unity among opposition groups and professional associations, which worked together to launch a nationwide campaign against further normalization with Israel. The Clinton administration and the Royal Court were surely unhappy. Political liberalization had reached its limits. The regime began to target many of the groups in the anti-normalization movement,<sup>79</sup> and the GID was a key instrument.

Since the late 1990s, civil society activists and opposition candidates have increasingly complained that the GID regularly intervenes in parliamentary election voting and in the candidates' electoral campaigns. For example, in the 2003 election one parliamentary candidate reported receiving a warning from the head of the GID about his campaign platform: "If your sons want to work in Jordan in the future, it might affect them."<sup>80</sup> US embassy officials, despite their boilerplate praise for the monarchy's (limited) efforts at political liberalization, have been well aware of the GID's political intimidation. One leaked embassy cable in 2007 claimed that "a number of members of Parliament are GID pensioners," and "political observers in Jordan

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<sup>79</sup> Jillian Schwedler, "Don't Blink: Jordan's Democratic Opening and Closing," *Middle East Report Online*, July 3, 2002, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero070302>.

<sup>80</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "Heavy Hand of the Secret Police Impeding Reform in the Arab World," *New York Times*, November 14, 2005.

assume a majority of the remaining MPs are also on the GID payroll.”<sup>81</sup> Members of several political parties were summoned by security officials on charges of distributing criticisms of government economic policies, according to a 2005 report by the country’s leading human rights center.<sup>82</sup> The GID’s policing power likewise extends to civil rights, education, employment, and the media, though that control takes different forms. To publish in the kingdom, writers and poets must typically submit their material to government offices controlled and supervised by GID officials. Jordanian citizens seeking employment in the Gulf Arab states require “good behavior” certificates from the GID to secure work permits. There are numerous instances of the government prosecuting individuals for speech it deems politically inappropriate (i.e., critical of the regime, its allies, and their policies). On university campuses GID personnel are present in administrative bodies and monitor student organizations.<sup>83</sup> Unsurprisingly, the University of Jordan’s Center for Strategic Studies public opinion polling from 1999 to 2011 revealed that an average of 75 percent of Jordanians feared criticizing their government.

This kind of authoritarian policing helps explain the effective muzzling and factionalization of Jordan’s opposition during the 2011 uprisings. Although Jordanians had many of the same grievances concerning socioeconomic conditions, corruption, and authoritarianism that animated protests in Egypt and Tunisia, they were unable to sustain mass protests. However, the protests did mark a shift by breaking “the taboo of criticizing the king and the royal family.”<sup>84</sup> This rhetorically transgressed lines previously established during King Abdullah’s public relations campaign of “Jordan First.” Moreover, protestors also demanded an end to the

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<sup>81</sup> US embassy Amman, “Jordan’s Security Services,” March 7, 2007, Wikileaks, [https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07AMMAN1031\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07AMMAN1031_a.html) m.

<sup>82</sup> The National Centre for Human Right, *Status Report of Human Rights, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2005* (Amman: The National Centre for Human Rights, 2005), 29.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with campus official, Amman, March 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Hisham Bustani, “Jordan—a Failed Uprising and a Re-emerging Regime,” *Your Middle East*, May 6, 2013, [http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/opinion/hisham-bustani-jordan-a-failed-uprising-and-a-reemerging-regime\\_12178](http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/opinion/hisham-bustani-jordan-a-failed-uprising-and-a-reemerging-regime_12178).



GID's expansive roles in public and political life in the Kingdom. That there were even small protests hinting at something more tangible was not to be tolerated. Members of the opposition credited the GID with co-opting opposition leaders and leveraging the Palestinian–East Bank divide to split the protesters.

Echoing the distinction Greitens made between types of secret police, one opposition activist described the GID as “horizontally oppressing” in contrast to the more violent “vertical oppression” found in Syria and Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Put another way, the GID's 1970s insertion into the public sector had matured into a multifaceted “executive arm of a sultanistic palace”<sup>86</sup> spanning from university campuses to the everyday operations of government ministries. The GID thus held the keys to social advancement during periods of economic expansion and to the means to survival during periods of austerity. One does not have to be a neoliberal critic of state intervention to sense that a parallel and clandestine authority to state functions can generate a multitude of negative consequences and inefficiencies. Simple invocations of “wasta” fail to capture the profound effect of the GID on the public sector when merit-based promotion, skills upgrading, effective service delivery, and equitable access take a back seat to GID interests. Ironically, at the same time that clandestine US support flowed to the GID to enhance its capacities, US and European Union aid flowed into programs to help Jordan's struggling public sector and ministries<sup>87</sup> build capacity and effectiveness. Lagging technology, poor training, and substandard practices were the most common obstacles these programs addressed.<sup>88</sup> The GID's ability to

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<sup>85</sup> Jordanian activist, Skype conversation, September 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Tell, "Early Spring in Jordan"

<sup>87</sup> Sa'eda Al-Kilani, *How to Become a Minister in Jordan: Wasta vs. Transparency in Senior Post Appointments* (self-pub., Lulu, 2016), <http://www.lulu.com/us/en/shop/saeda-kilani/how-to-become-a-minister-in-jordan/ebook/product-22954969.html>.

<sup>88</sup> For example, USAID's fiscal reform project emphasizes more efficient revenue collection and better data generation. In interviews, finance ministry officials privately admit a great deal of weak collection has “political origins.” See project web site, “Fiscal Reform and Public Financial Management in Jordan,” Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/fiscal-reform-and-public-financial-management-jordan>.

penetrate institutions and effectively gather information, however, suggests that it is not an axiomatic truth that Jordan's semi-rentier status or cultural practices condemn the public sector to perpetual administrative weakness.

### **Problems with the Best**

With the United States' "war on terror" and invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Amman and Washington began collaborating in new ways. King 'Abdullah II, who ascended the throne in 1999, had a background commanding the JAF's small special operations forces (SOF) units. The US military presence in Afghanistan afforded these SOF units the opportunity to participate in "blood sharing missions" with US units. The war on terror proved transformational for the GID as well.<sup>89</sup> It was linked to both the US rendition program and torture practices, and deployed agents in Afghanistan—in one case ending in disaster.<sup>90</sup> But the GID's true battlefield adventures came in Iraq. No other country, with the possible exception of Iran, had more experience or contacts with Iraqi society and elites than Jordan. In particular, the GID's experience managing trade and money across al-Anbar Province elevated its importance in the eyes of US military leaders.<sup>91</sup> The American disaster in Iraq created shockwaves across the border into Jordan. Despite short-term boosts from capital flight and private contractor consumption, the 2003 US invasion cut off what was left of Amman's most important trading and laundering partner. Uneven growth and security-driven debt has devastated Jordan's social safety net. Today, the

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<sup>89</sup> Jordanian security official, interview, Amman, May 2016.

<sup>90</sup> The December 2009 bombing of a CIA base in Khost, Afghanistan (discussed below).

<sup>91</sup> Civilian employee of US Army Central Command, interview, Shaw AFB South Carolina, January 2015.

Jordanian state is insolvent, further weakening the provision of education, health care, and infrastructure.<sup>92</sup>

American narratives, meanwhile, paint a very different portrait of Jordan. Reminiscent of US views of Israel and the Mossad in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>93</sup> Jordan, with its GID, is seen as the plucky ally guiding US soldiers and spies through the alien battlefields of first Iraq and then Syria.<sup>94</sup> At times such retrospectives, particularly of Jordan's role in the US occupation of Iraq, veer into counterfactual fantasy: if only this decision had been taken or that GID warning heeded, the war could have gone so much better.<sup>95</sup> These ahistorical portrayals reduce cities like Zarqa and Ma'an to stages for extremist recruitment and ideological fervor, giving little thought to preceding socioeconomic dislocations. Through it all, the Jordanian secret police come out the good guys.

Like most foreign policy myths, the GID success story has enough accuracy to detract from what is important. Whether the request comes from the Pentagon, State Department, or CIA, what Washington asks for, Amman does. Of course, an enduring problem for the monarchy is that Jordanian society does not share this affinity. Today, the percentage of Jordanians viewing the United States unfavorably is the highest not just in the Middle East but in the entire world.<sup>96</sup> Yet despite the regime's extreme nervousness about the presence of US soldiers, the US military

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<sup>92</sup> Pete W. Moore, "The Fiscal Politics of Rebellious Grievance in the Arab World: Egypt and Jordan in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Development Studies* 53, no. 10 (2017): 1634–49; Kirk H. Sowell, "Jordan Is Sliding to Insolvency," *Sada*, March 17, 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=63061>.

<sup>93</sup> See chapter 4 in McAlister, *Epic Encounters*.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Shane Harris, "The Mouse That Roars," *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2014; Ignatius, "Jordan's Ex-spy Chief." Not all press accounts are without criticism; see, for example, Bruce Tefft, "Clandestine Ties to Jordan Aid CIA Operations in the Middle East," *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2005.

<sup>95</sup> For a thorough critique of these beliefs, see Jason Brownlee, "Can America Nation-Build?" *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 314–40.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, Jacob Poushter, and Janell Fetterolf, "US Image Suffers as Publics around World Question Trump's Leadership," PEW Research Center, June 26, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/tarnished-american-brand/>.

annually conducts its largest regional training exercises, known as Eager Lion, in Jordan. For years it has been reported that the GID and the CIA run their own “fusion center,” managing everything from drone targeting to tactical operations in Syria and Iraq—largely independent from both the Jordanian and US military commands.<sup>97</sup>

Human rights organizations argue that the GID operates beyond the rule of law in Jordan and is a power unto itself.<sup>98</sup> Institutional decline in the form of unchecked power and weak enforcement encourages a level of corruption that the monarchy at times has been unable to ignore. The head of the GID in the 1990s, Samih Battikhi, was convicted of embezzling 17 million Jordanian dinars in public funds. Yet he reportedly served a reduced sentence under house arrest in Aqaba. His removal was also tied to the new king’s consolidation of power. When former GID head Muhammad al-Dahabi was brought to trial in 2012 for laundering Iraqi money, there was little surprise. To many, the spectacle of the trial amounted to the monarchy’s cheap response to the 2011 popular protests about corruption. Others hypothesized that the removal was really connected to a rivalry between al-Dahabi and former chief of the Royal Court Bassam ‘Awadallah. Regardless, decades of whispered-about GID profiteering was essentially normalized by limiting investigation into only these two GID officers.

US officials can be expected to ignore rivalries, corruption, and repression as long as the Hashemite regime continues to deliver. But they are starting to pay attention as the GID has increasingly proved an unreliable partner. A major effort by the CIA and the GID to fashion an effective militia client to shape the Syrian civil war failed and as of the summer of 2018 the Assad regime was reclaiming its southern border with Jordan. And there are more questions

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<sup>97</sup> US military personnel stationed in Jordan, informal conversations with author, March 2016.

<sup>98</sup> See for example, Human Rights Watch, “Suspicious Sweeps: The General Intelligence Department and Jordan’s Rule of Law Problem” September 18, 2006, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/09/18/suspicious-sweeps/general-intelligence-department-and-jordans-rule-law-problem>.

about perceived GID success. Prior to the US invasion of Afghanistan, the greatest single loss of CIA personnel occurred in the 1983 bombing of the US embassy in Beirut. In December 2009, a GID captain escorted a Jordanian individual believed to be an al-Qa‘ida informant into the CIA’s compound in Khost, Afghanistan. The explosion that followed killed seven CIA agents, topping the 1983 loss. Then in November 2016 at the Prince Faisal bin Hussein Air Base, a JAF soldier shot and killed three US servicemen in CIA employment, bringing the number of CIA deaths linked to Jordan’s security services to ten. This may be a record for any US ally. Those have not been the only failures. According to US military sources, a March 2016 assault by a GID paramilitary unit on a militant hideout in Irbid was a confused operation, taking far longer than necessary and resulting in the death of the unit’s commander. In June 2016 investigations by the *New York Times* and Al Jazeera revealed that GID officials had “systematically” sold CIA-supplied weapons intended for Syrian militias on the black market. It was impossible to ignore the theft, since some of the weapons surfaced in the killings of US trainers at another Jordanian base.

While CIA officials may chalk such losses and failures up to the costs of irregular warfare, US military officials stationed in or visiting Jordan express more concern. Since 2010, there has been rising criticism from some retired JAF officers of a host of Royal Court policies and stagnant socioeconomic conditions. The JAF officers’ dissatisfaction extends to the GID with which it has deep disagreements. Jordanian security officials profess “the GID and the JAF are one,”<sup>99</sup> but rumors of deep divisions persist—some traced to differences on policy toward the Syrian conflict, some linked to leadership rivalries, and some just about the spoils of war.

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<sup>99</sup> Jordanian security official, interview, Amman, May 2016.

Seen from a historical perspective, these problems, coupled with the country's poor socioeconomic health, are revealing what made the GID so useful to the CIA in the first place. The GID's vaunted experience and success in the 1970s came on the back of a postwar Jordanian society that was petrified, suspicious, and vulnerable. Rounding up suspects and penetrating networks owes less to any "wiring" as the popular accounts would have it than it does to the low ability to manipulate access to public goods. As Jordanian society has weathered decades of fiscal crisis,<sup>100</sup> the GID's leverage over its own citizens has grown. The same can be said of parts of Iraq and Syria: as war and intervention have brutalized those societies, the GID has been in the lead. That GID officials would bend these circumstances toward personal gain and not the national interest is just good intelligence tradecraft, only in reverse.

## **Conclusion**

A political economy history of the GID reveals a basic problem in Jordanian politics: as an authoritarian regime, the Hashemite monarchy has never been able to trust Jordanians. The GID first emerged to protect the regime from elite threats. Its primary role later shifted to the repression of popular opposition. The maturation of the GID into a powerful institutional and political actor exemplifies a structural weakness inherent in the problem of Jordanian politics. Namely, the directorate's capacity for protecting the monarchy has necessitated high costs to other parts of Jordanian society. The US foreign policy assumption that the GID (and the JAF) inoculate against threat confuses cause and effect. Well before the regional instability of the new century and the arrival in Jordan of Iraqi and Syrian refugees, the security sector's fiscal burden and the GID's unrestrained powers had enfeebled the state and the public sector. To be sure,

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<sup>100</sup> Moore, "The Fiscal Politics of Rebellious Grievance," 101.

Jordan's economic decline and fiscal crises are not due solely to the security forces. Yet popular hagiographies overlook their historical contributions and paint a false picture. At the same time and in the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings, fixation on the monarchy's imminent demise or survival simply leads in circles. An environment of declining public goods and a weakening public sector only reinforce the basics of the historical crisis. Sadly, protecting the Hashemite monarchy has always involved holding some part of Jordanian society hostage. That, in the end, is really what the GID does best.