

Deterrence in American
Foreign Policy:
Theory and Practice

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Implementation of the Deterrence Attempt

JORDAN—APRIL 1957

In 1957 Jordan was among the least stable of all the Arab states. Traditionally, the Hashemite monarchy had depended upon British subsidies and British influence to insure the stability of its rule. After Britain's general exit from the area, which in Jordan's case began with King Hussein's dismissal in March 1956 of the British commander of Jordan's military forces, General Sir John B. Glubb, this stabilizing force was no longer available. Bowing to strong domestic pressures emanating from sectors both of the public and of the officer corps, Jordan was forced to move closer to Egypt and Syria who, along with Saudi Arabia, offered in January 1957 to share in replacing the annual British budgetary subsidy to the Hashemites, hoping thereby to destroy the remnants of Whitehall influence in Amman. In return Hussein had to accept a joint military command with Syrian and Saudi Arabian troops stationed in Jordan.⁴⁰ Parliamentary elections held in October 1956 had paved the way for this switch in Jordan's orientation by returning a majority for the nationalist, anti-Western parties, including the National Socialists, who advocated Jordanian union with Egypt and Syria. A new government was formed under the premiership of pro-Egyptian Suleiman al-Nabulsi.

Although King Hussein was personally sympathetic to Western interests in the Middle East and was uncomfortable with Nasser's attempts to unite the Arab countries into a neutralist bloc under Egyptian leadership, he realized the precariousness of his pro-Western position and temporized, sanctioning several of Nasser's views. One result of this realignment was that Jordan initially condemned the Eisenhower Doctrine with the same vehemence as did Egypt and Syria. However, this apparent solidarity began to crumble almost as quickly as it had appeared. Of the three countries that had offered to take

Current Documents, pp. 1015-17.

over Britain's subsidy, only Saudi Arabia paid its share. Hussein concluded that either Egypt and Syria were too poor to pay or they were intending to use their aid as a means of political domination. He was further alarmed by the increasingly radical policies of the al-Nabulsi Cabinet, which included recognition of the Soviet Union, diplomatic relations with Moscow, and willingness to accept Soviet military and other aid.

Becoming increasingly concerned over the fate of his regime and encouraged by the prospects of U.S. assistance opened up by the Eisenhower Doctrine, Hussein decided to try to halt the pro-Nasser trend in Jordan, which was being led by his Prime Minister. Hussein dismissed Nabulsi on April 15, 1957 and precipitated a civil struggle. The King was supported only by his Bedouin troops and a few veteran politicians and was challenged by several powerful political leaders and by some of the highest-ranking officers in the army.⁴¹ The leaders of Syria and Egypt were apparently highly sympathetic to the cause of the King's opposition, but the extent of their active participation in the struggle was never clearly established. Neither Egypt nor the Soviet Union had openly committed itself to the overthrow of Hussein.

As the crisis became more acute, however, King Hussein began to claim that the independence and integrity of Jordan were threatened by "international communism"—a charge obviously meant for American ears—and the Eisenhower Administration did not fail to respond to the call. Later, Hussein's claims would prove extremely difficult to substantiate; but at the time Washington did not subject them to a thorough scrutiny because of its desire to safeguard Hussein's regime and the apparent urgency of the situation. Besides, regardless of whether a communist threat did in fact exist, salvaging the monarchy had become an end in itself, since it was perceived by the Eisenhower Administration as a crucial test of the credibility of the new approach and of the U.S. commitments embodied therein. On April 24 Eisenhower's press secretary, James

⁴¹ Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East*, p. 128.

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Hagerty, told a press conference that he had been authorized to say that both the President and the Secretary of State regarded the independence and integrity of Jordan as vital. A State Department spokesman interpreted Hagerty's statement as "a reminder to the world by the President that a finding has been made in the Joint Resolution of the Congress on the Middle East that the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of the Middle East were vital to the national interest of the United States and to world peace." This reminder was appropriate because of the threat to the independence and integrity of Jordan by international communism as King Hussein himself stated.⁴²

Thus the first step was taken toward interpreting the Eisenhower Doctrine more broadly as a mandate to intervene in any situation that, in the President's opinion, threatened the independence and integrity of any nation in the area.⁴³

Accordingly, on April 26, the Sixth Fleet was ordered into the eastern Mediterranean as a display of U.S. support for King Hussein. Soon after, on April 29, \$10 million in emergency aid was granted to Jordan. Luckily, Egypt and Syria failed to intervene in the struggle on the side of the antiroyalists, and the Soviet Union chose to limit its role in the crisis to issuing denunciations of the American actions. Israel also decided not to become involved. As a result, the conflict remained primarily domestic; and King Hussein was able to suppress the pro-Nasser faction, reconstitute a more loyal government, and establish firmer control over the army.

The effect that invoking the Eisenhower Doctrine had on the outcome of the crisis is debatable. Most observers have concluded that Hussein's success was primarily based on his own courage and good luck. He also received much needed help and encouragement from King Saud, who placed the Saudi Arabian troops stationed in Jordan under Hussein's direct command, and from the Iraqi monarchy, which concentrated its troops

⁴² *State Department Bulletin*, 36 (May 13, 1957), 768.

⁴³ Lafeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*, p. 198.

along the Jordanian border and promised to move into the I country if Syrian troops should attempt to enter the conflict.

In Washington, however, the rapid settling of the incident I was seen as a direct result of bringing King Hussein under the protection of the Eisenhower Doctrine. It was viewed as a setback for both Nasser and the Soviet Union and as a diplomatic ! success for the United States which confirmed the utility of the Eisenhower Doctrine. The administration failed to consider, however, that the successful intervention on Hussein's behalf also entailed important costs, and that it did not remove the fundamental instabilities in Jordan and in the region. The United States had now assumed a commitment to Hussein and enmeshed itself in what was basically an inter-Arab struggle. Its use of the Sixth Fleet raised cries against "gunboat diplomacy" and, as John C. Campbell notes, placed the United States in the eyes of many Arabs in a position "hardly distinguishable from that which the British had just been forced to relinquish." "

SYRIA—AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 1957

As the crisis in Jordan began to cool down, administration officials were almost immediately forced to focus their attention on an increasingly disturbing situation in Syria. The Syrian regime had been developing a closer relationship with the Soviet Union throughout the spring and summer of 1957. It may be noted that whatever its value for discouraging Soviet military ventures in the Middle East, the Eisenhower Doctrine had not succeeded in deterring the Soviets from giving traditional forms of economic and military assistance to Middle Eastern regimes. In August the Syrian Defense Minister visited Moscow and arranged large-scale Soviet credits for expanded trade and for Syria's development program. The Soviets then announced that they were sending the Syrian army heavy shipments of military supplies, some of which had already arrived in Syria. Soon thereafter, on August 13, the Syrians announced that they had uncovered a U.S.-sponsored plot to overthrow the government

" Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East*, pp. 130-31.