

Dawn of a New Era

With King Hussein's death, Jordan is left to an untested son

By SCOTT MAC LEOD/AMMAN

JORDAN'S KING OF NEARLY A HALF-CENTURY had always been both a fatalist and an optimist. So after six months of unsuccessful treatment for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hussein bin Talal abruptly anointed as successor a little-known son, Abdullah, who promised the failing monarch "to follow in your footsteps."

When a final effort to abate his cancer failed last week, the King came home. On Saturday, Abdullah was sworn in as regent with full governing authority. And on Sunday, as the kingdom mingled fears with prayers, Hussein died, leaving Jordanians to confront a future without the only ruler most of them have ever known.

Even at 37, Abdullah looks almost too young for the job, but outwardly at least he is unmistakably Hussein's son. Like his father, he leaned forward on the edge of his seat as he chatted informally last week with half a dozen journalists, displaying the same self-confidence, modesty and British-accented speech. He parried questions as if he had been doing so all his life, instead of literally for the first time. He has stepped smartly into his new role, and insists that Jordan will not alter significantly. "I have my own areas of interest, the economy, things I'd like to concentrate on as things settle down," he said. "But you are not going to see anything different. His Majesty has given me a mission, and I will carry it out to the letter."

That kind of continuity is crucial for his small but strategic country, and for a King who lacks political experience. Abdullah believes his military career has prepared him well, putting him closely in touch with ordinary Jordanians as well as Washington generals. While Hussein's sickbed decision shocked him, he

appears unfazed at stepping out to lead the family "team." As Hussein counseled him years ago, "Have I ever steered you guys wrong?" Still, every citizen and friend of Jordan wonders if Abdullah will prove up to the job his father handled with such finesse.

Many will choose to remember the doughty King mainly as a survivor. He succeeded to the Hashemite throne in 1952, at 16, and when he came home last week, at 63, he was the Middle East's longest-serving leader, a ruler of personal courage and political caution who navigated his country through the intrigues of the cold war to the consummation of peace with Israel.

Yet Hussein was always more than merely a survivor. Though he made costly mistakes, he emerged as the region's strongest force for moderation. Though he was frequently betrayed by friend and foe alike, even targeted for assassination, he responded with magnanimity. He molded a modern, cohesive state from a collection of Bedouin tribes and Palestinian refugees, and won something rare in his nasty neighborhood: a life-long reputation as a man of tolerance.

His disappointments were legion: the vanquishing of Hashemite rule in Jerusalem and the West Bank; the vain efforts to negotiate a permanent Palestinian settlement; the bittersweet peace with Israel; even the falling out with his



younger brother Hassan in the last six months of his life. His quiet but unflinching partnership with the West earned him little but trouble from other Arab states. Despite everything, his charisma and unwavering hope created a powerful bond with his subjects and made Jordan one of the Middle East's most respected nations.

Hussein's fatalism could hardly have been anything else. On July 20, 1951, he accompanied his grandfather King Abdullah to Jerusalem to pray at the revered al-Aqsa Mosque. As they entered the enclosure, an assassin shot and killed the King, narrowly missing Hussein. He would survive at least 17 more murder attempts, coup plots, army insurrections and a civil war. Such was his generous nature that he would later laugh about some of the more outlandish conspiracies, like the time he discovered that a bottle supposedly containing his nose drops was filled with lethal acid. Even when the plotters were arrested, they didn't pay with their lives, reflecting a unique spirit of forgiveness in a region where the rule is an eye for an eye.

For a man gifted with grace and charm Hussein seldom had an easy family life. His childhood was humble for a member of a royal family that, according to tradition, descended directly from the Prophet Muhammad. In his 1962 memoir Hussein wrote that a sister had died of pneumonia because their home lacked heat in the "bitter cold of an Amman winter." His father reigned briefly but was forced to abdicate because of schizophrenia.

In the 1967 Six-Day War, Hussein made his biggest mistake. He signed a defense treaty with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, then the strongman of Arab nationalism, and when the fighting broke out, launched an artillery attack on Israeli forces. Within 72 hours, Israel had captured the West Bank and taken East Jerusalem, ruled by Jordan since the 1948 creation of Israel.

The King was not invited to join President Jimmy Carter's 1978 Camp David negotiations, which produced the landmark Israeli-Egyptian peace accord. But for many years afterward, Hussein played a pivotal role, often behind the scenes, in diplomacy to achieve a comprehensive peace. Besides conducting secret negotiations with Israeli leaders for years, he became a crucial partner of the Palestinians at the 1991 Madrid talks that led to the 1993 Oslo accords. In 1994 he fulfilled a long-standing ambition by negotiating Jordan's peace treaty with Israel.

Despite an infusion of international aid, the agreement failed to bring broader peace or local prosperity. Hussein's refusal to join the gulf coalition against Saddam Hussein, for fear of provoking his pro-Iraq citizenry, angered lifelong Western and Arab friends, and the embargo imposed on a defeated Saddam

has savaged Jordan's economy as well. The King deeply mourned the assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with whom he had hoped to mold a Palestinian state, and many Jordanians grew embittered at the hard-line policies of Benjamin Netanyahu. In Hussein's lifetime, when Jordan may have had its best chance, the country never developed into a constitutional democracy.

Without his father around for some tutoring, Abdullah will find the going tough as he grapples with Jordan's blighted economy, disenchantment with Israel, and Saddam's dangerous regime. The biggest fear is that in times of trouble the son will lack the authority and skill that enabled his father to straddle the divides. ■

Questions

1. How is the late King Hussein likely to be remembered?
2. What traits does Abdullah share with his father? What are the main challenges facing Abdullah?

"I am not starting from zero. I've had the honor over the last 20 years of being by His Majesty's side."

"Peace with Israel, I believe, is the best thing that Jordan could ever have done."

"I have a great relationship with the Clinton Administration. We are on the same sheet of music."

—Abdullah Bin Hussein, in an interview last week

Love at First Wonk

Everyone says brainiacs Clinton and Barak are made for each other. But can they find peace?

By LISA BEYER

WHO IS SMARTER, U.S. PRESIDENT BILL Clinton or Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak? James Carville, who has served both men, had to think a minute. “Barak is probably the most unique person I’ve met in terms of his range of skills,” he explains. “Clinton is brilliant but nowhere near the mathematician or musician that Barak is.” Then again, Carville notes, the President has astonishing people skills.

That combustible mix of charm and intellect was on vibrant display last week as the two men grinned their way from photo op to photo op, cementing what they clearly hope will become a fast friendship of mutual interest and political romance. Eager for breakthroughs in the Middle East peace

process, Barak and Clinton orchestrated a public embrace meant to persuade Israelis that with a strong ally in Washington they can afford the concessions new treaties will demand.

In his relations with Clinton, Barak hopes for what his mentor, assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, had achieved—direct, instant and frequent access to the President. In the weeks after his election, Barak resisted approaches of lesser U.S. officials, such as special envoy Dennis Ross, preferring to wait for a White House chat. Nor did Barak want his subordinates running re-

lations. In a confidential memo, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright advised Clinton that the ex-general was secretive and didn’t have a large circle of aides “who knew his mind.” A one-on-one relationship with Barak, she said, would be “extremely important.”

Clinton evidently took her words to heart. In their first session at the White House, he and Barak met for 2½ hours with no aides present, not even a notetaker—a highly unusual format. Then the two men and their wives choppered to Camp David for a sleepover. After a chatty, getting-to-know-you fish dinner, the two leaders adjourned for a discussion on a range of issues including terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, while Hillary and Nava Barak discussed their own shared interests in women’s health issues. Clinton took the couple on a stroll through Camp David, which figures so prominently in Israeli history. As he showed them the cabin where the Camp David accords were negotiated, the two men shared recollections of Rabin. Shortly after 1 a.m., the party retired, their friendship cemented and their historic mission

clear, locked up by Barak’s assurance that Israel was prepared to make “painful compromises” for peace.

That was good news to Clinton, who is hungry for a foreign policy triumph. Barak is also eager for a fast peace, before a White House change of guard disrupts Washington’s ability to facilitate new deals. Throughout the trip,

both sides insisted that Barak’s election signaled a departure from the obstructionist policies of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. After the first meeting of Clinton and Barak, the President told aides Barak was a leader “who will be scrupulous in terms of living up to his obligations.” The unspoken appendix: “unlike Netanyahu.” ■

Questions

1. What was unusual about the first White House meeting between Clinton and Barak?
2. What goals do Clinton and Barak share?

BARAK’S TO-DO LIST

- ✓ **BUILD** a solid, inclusive governing coalition
- ✓ **WITHDRAW** Israeli troops from south Lebanon
- ✓ **NEGOTIATE** a final peace with the Palestinians
- ✓ **RESUME** land-for-peace talks with Syria
- ✓ **PARE DOWN** privileges of ultra-Orthodox Israelis
- ✓ **ATTRACT** investment to invigorate the economy