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Jordan

Is it or is it not Palestine?

The world was surprised recently by Jordan's King Hussein severing his and his country's involvement with the Palestinian Arabs of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and by thus exacerbating the political vacuum in the area. In "washing his hands" of the problems of this area and its inhabitants, the king made the statement "Jordan is not Palestine!"

What are the facts?

■ In order to understand King Hussein's statement, a review of Jordan's history is in order. It is a short one. Before World War I, the area now known as the "Middle East" was part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire. The French and British defeated the Turks, drove them out of the area, and split it between themselves. The French took what is now Syria and Lebanon as their "sphere of influence"; the British took Iraq, Palestine, Egypt and the Arabian peninsula.

■ In 1917, Britain had issued the Balfour Declaration, a statement expressing Britain's promise for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." In 1922, the League of Nations granted Britain the mandate over Palestine, specifically including the requirements of the Balfour Declaration. Since Biblical times, the country now called "Palestine" always included the area now occupied by Israel (including the "West Bank"), Gaza and Jordan. The British drew a few lines on the map and granted the entire area east of the Jordan River—close to 80% of mandated Palestine—as a kingdom to Abdullah, the grandfather of King Hussein. The Jewish homeland, promised in the Balfour Declaration by the same British, was reduced to a mere one-fifth of its original size. Transjordan (as the new country was called) attained its independence from Britain in 1946.

■ In 1947, the United Nations proposed a plan under which the just over 20% remnant of Palestine was to be further divided between the Arabs living in the area and the Jews. Such was the desire of the Jews to get their homeland, and so great the need to gather what was left of European Jewry

after the Holocaust, that they accepted this further partition. The Arabs flatly refused. When Israel declared its independence in 1948, five Arab armies invaded it on the very day of its birth. Transjordan's army, led by British officers, was among them. The Israelis defeated all five armies. Egypt managed to hang on to Gaza, and Transjordan to the "West Bank" and the eastern sector of Jerusalem. Transjordan promptly renamed itself Jordan, proceeded to annex the area and to keep it as an integral part of its kingdom.

■ In 1967, Hussein made the fatal mistake of his kingly career. He let himself be seduced by Egypt's Nasser to join in what became known as the Six Day War. All Arab armies were devastated. Israel regained the "West Bank." Pending final disposition of the area, Israel has administered it ever since. The inhabitants retained Jordanian citizenship. Israel allowed Jordan to stay in control of the judicial systems, of the school system, and of the local administrative and religious networks.

■ The Jordanians, of course, are the real Palestinian Arabs. Over 70% of the 2.8 million population of the kingdom are Palestinian Arabs. The Arabs of Jordan are exactly the same people as the Arabs living in the "West Bank." There is no difference between them in language, ethnicity or social customs. Before the Six Day War, the concept of a second Palestinian state located in the "West Bank" had never occurred to anybody. Because the Palestinians, *do* have a country. It's Jordan. Over 2 million Palestinians live in Jordan, and only 800,000 in the territories administered by Israel. Do they need another country? Of course not! It makes no difference what King Hussein says. Jordan is and always has been Palestine. His saying "it ain't so" does not change that at all.

One wonders why King Hussein would abdicate his "rights" to the area west of the Jordan River, cutting its inhabitants loose and leaving the field to the Israelis and the PLO. The King is a clever man and a survivor. He has come to realize that he already has 2 million Palestinians in Jordan. They owe him little loyalty and are in almost constant rebellion. It's clear now to King Hussein that if 800,000 Arab Palestinians from the "West Bank" were to form an independent PLO state, they would seek union with their brethren in Jordan. But that union would not be under King Hussein—it would be under the PLO. And that would be the end of his dynasty. Whatever statement King Hussein wishes to make: It is clear—historically and by common sense—that *Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan.*

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East

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