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Jordan is the weak link to Trump's 'Deal of the Century'

By Glen Segell
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This year, 2019, has been a year of anniversaries – and some may wish to build upon them. The peace treaty with the Kingdom of Jordan was signed 25 years ago, as the second after Egypt, 40 years ago.

Sometimes an outsider is required to say what the Israeli establishment itself cannot say out loud: US President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century" requires Jordan to be part of it. The question of the Jordanian regime's stability is a longstanding taboo in the Israeli intelligence community; they do not talk about it in public or even in press briefings. There are disturbing signs of Jordan's precariousness. It faces difficult conditions compounded by regional instability and the influx of refugees from Syria. Jordan has a severe economic crisis, rising unemployment and apparent corruption at high levels. Weekly protests are held in Amman and sometimes in other major cities. The king frequently changes ministers in his government and dismisses generals.

Another concern for Israel is the clause of the 25-year-old treaty that grants Jordan responsibility for the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Any crisis between the Palestinian Authority and the Trump government could also affect the Palestinian residents of Jordan – especially if the PA chooses to spark protests on the Temple Mount and in Jerusalem.

If the Israeli government takes steps to annex or to apply Israeli law to parts of Judea and Samaria, Jordan will head the Arab camp to call on the international community not to recognize these measures. Other difficulties in the relations between Israel and Jordan include land disputes in Naharayim and Moshav Tzofar, the dispute over the digging of the Dead Sea Canal and the ongoing criticism of Jordan over its purchase of gas from Israel.

Thus, there emerges a scenario whereby Jordan turns out to be the weak link in the American peace initiative – both if the king refuses to promote the deal and if unrest emerges internally and in Jerusalem. There is no evidence that foreign aid can prop up unstable regimes indefinitely. The 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran underscores this.

Any peace deal for Israel needs to go beyond the superficial and tackle the core. This takes protracted engagement with society. The majority of residents in Jordan are Palestinians, so Trump will need to engage with Palestinians in Jordan before he engages with Palestinians in Israel. Mere presentation of a political treaty and its signature will result in the type of peace that Israel has had with Egypt for 40 years and Jordan for 25 years – cold and fragile.

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