

One Hundred Years after the Sykes-Picot Agreement

The case of Jordan

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Abstract

- The Jordanian state was not mentioned specifically in the agreement, but was carved out later by Winston Churchill in 1921.
- The state witnessed several waves of refugees: in 1948, 1967, 1990, 2003 and 2011-now, changing the demographic and political nature of the state each time.
- The monarchy proved to be resilient as the major two ethnic groups, the East Jordanians and the Palestinians, wanted the monarchy to serve as an umbrella and an arbiter. The political system was relatively more open than most of its neighbors.
- Economically, Jordan, much like many Arab countries, employed a “semi-rentier” system, benefitting from rents coming from oil (grants from the gulf), remittances and foreign aid (mainly from the United States recently).
- While the system has proved resilient, there are serious pressures today:
- On the political front, many Jordanians are frustrated with the way the state is run, and the lack of a serious voice for the citizenry. Several thousand protests took place after 2011, although concern about ending up in a situation like Syria or Egypt has practically ended these demonstrations for the time being.
- The Syrian refugee problem.
- ISIS.
- Economically, unemployment is very high (13% overall, 30% among the youth), public debt is at 94% of GDP, and the fiscal deficit is over 10%. There does not seem to be a medium term plan to deal with these issues. The decline in oil prices means that sustained foreign assistance from the Gulf is not guaranteed.
- One hundred years after Sykes-Picot, Jordan is still struggling with a modern concept of citizenship that acknowledges equal citizenship for all regardless of gender, ethnic origin or religion. Civil strife in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, communities that are very diverse, show the need for the development of such a new concept of citizenship.