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**„BENEFICIAL” DEPENDENCY
– BRITISH DOMINANCE IN JORDAN (1946–1956)**

Contemporary international relations are premised on the theoretical assumption rooted in so called Westphalin principles, denoting a specific doctrine of state sovereignty. In the 20th century this doctrine was supplemented with another principle which acknowledged the right of nations to self-determination. It needs to be noted that in Western Europe and the United States of America, the concepts of the nation and the state are closely related. As a result, the idea of national self-determination is treated, in practice, as a prolongation of the idea of state sovereignty. This particular principle has it that states are absolutely independent of foreign influences both in terms of their internal affairs and foreign policies. One state must not be in any way legally conditioned by any other state for a prolonged period of time. An exception naturally arises when a voluntary union is established between states. In this case, however, according to international law a new entity (state) is called into existence which represents the members of the concluded union after they have relinquished their sovereignty for the sake of this new entity (Łoś-Nowak 2000: 167). All forms of incomplete sovereignty disappeared from the domain of international law. This became a fact in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century when the Roman Empire of the German Nation had collapsed during the Napoleonic wars. The formula of protectorate, imposed on some states in Asia and Africa by the European great powers, constituted a relic of the status of a vassal state. The Europeans believed this status to reflect an ulterior nature of the nations of Asia and Africa. When the colonial order was abolished in the 20th century, the status of a state under protectorate was done away with alongside the status of protectorate¹.

¹ The kingdom of Bhutan is the only exception, being India’s protectorate. It needs to be added that this status is limited to the domain of foreign relations. The status of

After the Second World War, the doctrine favoring fully-fledged states prevailed in the global scale. Nevertheless, reality often proves to be much more complex than any theory enshrined in constitutional treaties and official declarations. For this reason it is frequently very difficult to describe the reality of contemporary international relations precisely. More than often such reality is disguised by official propaganda or masked by some widespread convictions in which some societies are inclined to believe.

Inequality of state potential, that is characteristic of contemporary states, effectively and necessarily results in practical subordination and dependence of smaller states (actors) present in the international arena on states (actors) accorded a status of great power. In the following paper an example of such dependence will be discussed, focusing on the relations between Great Britain and one of the modern Arab states – namely, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the specific status that it enjoyed in the period of 1946–1956. The situation experienced by Jordan was very interesting in that period. It is worth investigating it for it demonstrates the manner in which a colonial status could be transformed into modern forms of dependence. Also, the case of Jordan evidences interpretative difficulties that arise in such circumstances. It shows that the dependent status does not necessarily mean exploitation. On the contrary, it may mean profits available to the governing elite in the dependent state as well as gains to the whole society of such a state.

The colonial legacy

The Jordanian state was called into existence in 1921, as a result of a decision taken by the British authorities who tried to re-arrange the Arab territories won at the end of 1918 during the war fought against the Ottoman Empire. Out of the area delimited by the Palestinian mandate, the British cut out the territories east of the Jordan River and established there the Emirate of Transjordan. King of Mecca and Hejaz, Hussein Ibn Ali’s son, Abd Allah, was nominated Emir – meaning duke – of the new state. The king was a member of the influential Hashemi family who supported Great Britain during the First World War. The granting to Abd Allah of the position of the ruler in Transjordan was

Bhutan *vis-à-vis* India is a result of agreements concluded in the period of British dominance there, which remained unchanged after 1947.

motivated by the British obligation to reward the Hashemite clan. The British had promised that this family would rule in the Arab provinces of the late Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, by this move London implemented its more general agenda aimed at establishing its indirect governance there. Many colonial areas were controlled by the British indirectly, via such local rulers. In this particular case, the British had an additional motive – they wanted to diminish the territory of Palestine proper, to which the so called Balfour Declaration of 1917 applied. This Declaration allowed for mass Jewish settlement in the region. Taking into account all of those circumstances, during the talks conducted on 28–30 May in 1921 between Winston Churchill and Abd Allah, the territory of Transjordan was offered to the Hashemi Emir to rule (Lunt 1999: 19).

In the period of 1922–1946, the Emirate of Transjordan constituted a typical example of British protectorate. The British officials tightly controlled financial affairs of the dukedom. Military forces of Transjordan – the so called Arab Legion – were under command of a British officer as well. As a matter of fact, the Legion's duties were more typical of gendarmerie than of an army. In 1939, a British major, John Bagot Glubb, was appointed Commander-in-chief of the Legion. The Legion's units were maintained by subsidies granted by London. The British protectors keenly supported the authority of Abd Allah. Nonetheless, his power was limited to narrowly defined home affairs. It is worth adding that Transjordan was a poor region: in 1921 it was only inhabited by 200 thousand people. However, by the year of 1946, the population of the country doubled. The Hashemite Emir established there quite an efficient civil administration, while political control of London remained undisturbed (Lunt 1999: 11–12).

During the Second World War, J.B. Glubb persuaded the imperial military authorities that the Arab Legion should be enlarged and turned into a real army. So far the Legion played the role of armed militia whose tasks involved mainly the suppression of internal unrests and civil rebellions. Its manpower, which in 1939 amounted to 1900 people, was increased four times. Moreover, the Legion got equipment similar to a light British military division. It needs to be added that in 1941 the Legion, commanded by Glubb, took part in an important operation against anti-British government in Iraq. The Transjordanian forces played some role in the abolishment of the Bagdad government and the creation of the pro-British regime in Iraq (Glubb 1957: 237–241).

The specific nature of the British-Jordanian relations

The British authorities appreciated the loyalty of Abd Allah which he had demonstrated during the war. The operation performed subsequently in Iraq could be seen as an exemplar of effective political control in the scale of the whole Middle East. In 1946, the British government declared that Transjordan ceased to be its protectorate and Abd Allah was no longer to be an emir – he was acknowledged a king. In March of 1946, Great Britain and the Kingdom of Transjordan concluded a formal military alliance. The treaty confirmed the status of Transjordan as an independent state but simultaneously guaranteed that the British army should retain all of the privileges it had enjoyed so far on the territory of this Arab state when it was still under the British protectorate. Granting independence to Transjordan was not a result of any local struggle for independence but rather it was a consequence of the British strategy. The authorities in Amman and London did not want to change the conditions on which they cooperated but only to raise the status of Transjordan symbolically (Salibi 1998: 152–153).

The new state was closely connected with London. Financial affairs were the main component of the subordination mechanism – the financial dependence of Amman on the British subsidies was absolute. The kingdom, occupying a desert land and counting 400 thousand residents, used the British subsidies even to cover some of its internal, civil expenses. Its military affairs were more often discussed in London than in Amman. The British generals conceived of the Arab Legion as of part of the British imperial forces in the Middle East. In the summer of 1946, the Legion counted 6633 soldiers. In the budget year of 1946/1947, the cost of its maintenance was calculated by the British officials at 2 330 889 pound sterling. Out of this amount, the military functions consumed 1 889 274 pound sterling, while policing – 441 615. To compare, the total expenses of the state of Transjordan in this year were calculated at 2 million 900 thousand pounds. The military expenses of Transjordan were fully covered by the British taxpayer.² It gives us an idea how big a share of the total expenses of this Arab state

² Public Record Office Foreign Office (further quoted as: PRO FO) 371/52605 Gen. Alan Cunningham from Amman to Colonial Office 23 January 1946 and The Military Units of the Arab Legion 4 June 1946.

was constituted by the maintenance costs of the Legion, demonstrating at the same time the scale of its dependence on Great Britain.

In 1948, the Kingdom of Transjordan took part in a war fought in Palestine, as a result of which it occupied the central part of the region, including Eastern Jerusalem. The issue of struggle over Palestine is too complex to be discussed in detail within the bounds of the present paper. Nonetheless, for the sake of this paper, it is important to mention the fact that it was in this period that new territories were included in the Transjordanian state, while the name of the state itself was changed into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Arab Legion was enlarged again: the number of soldiers serving in its units was increased to several thousands. Its enlargement was financed from the British sources. In 1955, the Legion, counting then around 20 thousand soldiers, cost already as much as 10 million 20 thousand pounds sterling. Out of this amount, the British Foreign Office provided 7 million 500 thousand, while the War Office 1 million 250 thousand, which was supplemented with two smaller grants offered by the War Office (amounting to 350 thousand and 170 thousand pounds sterling, respectively). The input of the Jordanian government amounted to 750 thousand pounds sterling³.

The dependence in the domain of the military was not solely financial. J.B. Glubb remained the Jordanian army's Commander-in-chief. He transformed the Legion into an efficient army. He organized the Arab units as forces fully integrated with the British imperial military forces. Command positions in the Legion were also retained by other British officers – such was the state of affairs as concerns the top military positions, of course. In 1955, there served in the Legion 75 British officers, including 15 of them who had been employed on the basis of long-term contracts, whereas 60 other officers had been delegated by the British army to serve in the Arab Legion – they continued to preserve the status of active British military men, being formally obliged to follow orders issued by their headquarters in London⁴. Finally, J.B. Glubb himself constituted a symbol of specific relations between Jordan and Great Britain. His position was of informal nature, being inherited from the colonial period. J.B. Glubb stayed in command of the Arab Legion in the period of 1939–1946, i.e. when it was effectively just a British military unit. After 1946, the Legion was turned into an

³ PRO FO 371/115682 September 13, 1955.

⁴ PRO FO 371/115682 September 13, 1955.

army of the independent state of Transjordan. Yet Glubb remained its Commander-in-chief nonetheless. In Amman, he represented the British Empire. The King and the Jordanian elite perceived him to be a mouthpiece of the British authorities even though he officially did not hold any of the British offices. At the same time, he was hoped to promote Amman’s postulates in London owing to his influences in the milieu of the political elites. In London he was, in turn, seen as a guarantor of good relations with Jordan. When in 1955 some tensions of personal nature arose between J.B. Glubb and King Hussein (the grandson and successor of Abd Allah), the London officials thought it necessary to exert pressure on the king in order to have Glubb retain his position⁵. These examples demonstrate clearly the type of the uneven relationship that had been established between the two partner states.

Advantages and disadvantages of the dominance

There was a big difference in the manner in which the relations between Jordan and Great Britain were perceived by the former Transjordan’s elites and the Palestinian population that had been included in the Kingdom in 1948. It is also noteworthy that around 1954, the dependence of the Jordanian state on London was criticized in the British press as well. The Amman elite had accepted even those aspects of the dependent status that, as it seems, were criticized by the liberal political commentators in Britain. It was in the British press that J.B. Glubb started to be nicknamed „pro-consul” and a *de facto* ruler of Jordan. Precisely this gave rise to an opposition in Jordan. Since 1950 the Palestinians began to protest more and more fiercely against the dependent status of Jordan. The British press highlighted this dependence and described it in terms of an anachronism. By contrast, the king and his allies did not see the dependence on Britain as a major political problem. The financial roots of this situation had already been indicated in the present paper. There was, however, one more, deeper cause behind those controversies. Namely, the British press and the Palestinian activists alike used a language that made use of the doctrine of national sovereignty (sovereignty of the state). Meanwhile, what was important from the point of view of King Abd Allah and his immediate environment was, by contrast, the interest of the Hashemite clan. Over

⁵ PRO FO 371/115683 Glubb and King Hussein relation.

the whole period of his reign, this ruler promoted an idea of a union between Jordan and Syria – he was to rule the state that was to be established – so called Greater Syria. In view of political instability in Damascus, the plan to establish Greater Syria could appear realistic. The occupation of central Palestine in 1948 could be seen as an introductory phase to the plan's execution. However, on 20 July in 1951, King Abd Allah was shot in Jerusalem, which put an end to the whole idea. In one of the British reports of the period, immediately following the murder, one could read quite clearly that the king toyed with an idea of using the Arab Legion to „unite” Syria and Jordan. The idea was disliked by the British though and King himself finally considered it too risky.⁶

On the whole, however, the death of Abd Allah did not change the fact that in Amman they perceived the reality not in terms of a nation state but in terms of the Arab world as a single whole as well as taking for granted the primacy of a struggle to safeguard the interest of the Hashemite family. Until 1958, the Hashemite family ruled also in Iraq, believing in addition that they had a dynastic right to rule in the Hejaz country. Paradoxically, this broad perspective accounted for the fact that their dependence on the British was not seen as a degrading phenomenon.

As far as the British army is concerned, it just wanted to have a safe base in Jordan and believed that the things worked in this respect well. However, in the situation of intensifying protests against the British presence in the Middle East, the military circles in London put forward a conception that was to – at least temporarily – strengthen the presence of the British forces in Jordan. The promotion of this conception intensified after 1952, which was related to the collapse of the British influences in Egypt (Polk 1975: 222). In addition, the British liked the idea that there was no need to conclude any formal agreement with Amman because of their indirect influences and provisional approvals for their agenda that they were able to get. J.B. Glubb personally tried to explain it to his supervisors that this kind of plan was not right when seen from a long-term perspective. The British presence – if too conspicuous – was likely to fuel the existing pan-Arab opposition.⁷ In any case, the British top military authorities did not choose to revise

⁶ PRO FO 371/91838.

⁷ Public Record Office War Office (further quoted as: PRO WO) 216/382 Top Secret, March 4, 1952.

their plans. The generals in London thought Jordan to be something akin to a military training field for the British army.

However, increasing problems related to this situation came to the foreground. The first of them involved intensifying protests by Jordan's urban populace who objected to the British domination. In the years 1954–1956, Palestinians, who constituted 2/3 of the population of enlarged Jordan (the number of people living in the country rose to 400 thousand in 1947 and to 1 million 200 thousand after Jordan had occupied central Palestine in 1948), were in permanent opposition. In 1955, when the authorities in Amman wanted to join the pro-Western „Bagdad Pact”, they were prevented from doing so by mass protests of the population. The army had to be used to suppress the unrest (Robins 2004: 70 and 74). Moreover – as much as it is less remembered – the British side had to face the costs of the political domination, too.

Since 1949 the situation in the Jordanian-Israeli borderland had been tense. Groups of Palestinian fighters sneaked into the Israeli territory and attacked the Jewish settlers there. In revenge, the Israeli military units attacked the Palestinian settlements. The situation was constantly on the verge of war. Meanwhile, on the basis of the military agreement that had been signed by Jordan and Great Britain in 1946 and was subsequently updated in 1948, the sides of the treaty were to support one another in case of war. In 1946, the British were certain to have in mind a potential conflict with the USSR and wanted to have access to Jordan's resources. However, after the Israeli state had been created, Great Britain could easily become entangled in a war that entailed the defense of the Jordanian territory in case of much likely Jewish aggression. At the end of 1953, when an Israeli commando destroyed the village Qibya near Nablus, the Jordanians asked the British for help. Fortunately, the attack did not change into war. Nonetheless, in January of 1954, the British headquarters presented to the Foreign Office their plan of attack of the British army against Israel. According to this plan, the British air forces were to destroy the Israeli aircraft and bombard the Israeli military objects. The British navy was to block the Israeli ports, while the commando units were to be landed at Tel Aviv. The military presented the plan as a feasible agenda that did not provoke any opposition. Naturally, the British civil administration must have realized what catastrophic consequences the implementation of that plan could bring in terms of propaganda. The military scenario certainly served only as

a preventive tool. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate the potential costs of the seemingly so beneficial alliance with Jordan⁸.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it was the Jordanians that broke the close relations with London. The young king Hussein came to the conclusion that the intensifying internal opposition was too dangerous and had to be appeased by some spectacular gesture. The influence exerted by the British officers undermined his personal authority. The young monarch was seen as a marionette. On 1 March in 1956, King first removed from the office and the next day expelled General J.B. Glubb and a few other British commanders⁹. Subsequent events were related to the conflict between Great Britain and Egypt that concerned the Suez Canal. In October of 1956, the British ventured an intervention against the Egyptian leader, Naser, but failed to succeed (Jamsheer 1987: 73, 116–120). On the wave of pan-Arab enthusiasm, in order to stay in touch with the masses, the Jordanian authorities expelled all of the British officers taking thus the risk of losing the British subsidy. However, owing to his skilful politics in 1957 and 1958, King Hussein managed to persuade the USA that his country had a strategic potential (Robins 2004: 101). He presented himself in terms of an unyielding defender of the Western values against communism. The USA granted Jordan their financial assistance, while the British resumed providing the Jordanians with part of the former subsidies as well.

The political skillfulness of King Hussein and mistakes made by his enemies are perhaps of lesser importance. It is more interesting that both King Abd Allah I, and his grandson Hussein I, as well as the current monarch Abd Allah II, continued to maintain the Jordanian army out of foreign subsidies. As a matter of fact, the Jordanian state itself has existed for decades in part owing to the foreign assistance. Therefore, dependence is a permanent feature of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan's political profile. The dependence and material assistance related to it, strengthens the position of the monarchy both in internal and external relations. It is to be stressed that as much as this situation is

⁸ PRO FO 371/110919, 14 January 1954. Chiffs of Staff Committee Joint Planning Staff.

⁹ PRO FO 371/121540.

understandable from the vantage point of practice, it is doubtless totally alien to the European understanding of sovereignty and the principles governing politics.

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