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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

18 November 1966

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 19-66

SUBJECT: Current Problems for the Jordanian Regime\*

1. The 13 November Israeli raid on the Hebron district of Jordan has shattered the modus vivendi which had lasted for several years along the Israeli-Jordan border. During this period, King Hussain has made a sustained effort to avoid provocations to Israel. This has involved such steps as preventing Arab saboteurs from crossing from Jordan into Israel and keeping his armored forces east of the Jordan River. These measures have been politically unpopular at home and have subjected him to criticism from other Arab states.

2. Hence, Hussain is particularly bitter at the size of the attack and the damage it caused. He feels he has been betrayed by an assault out of all proportion to the provocation.

\* This memorandum has been produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence and the Clandestine Services.

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He has been -- and would be -- able to live with an occasional nighttime foray by Israeli forces resulting in the destruction of, say, a police station and a few houses. However, the recent raid involved an infantry brigade supported by armor, aircraft, and artillery; it resulted in about 50 deaths -- half of them Jordanian soldiers -- and in the destruction of about 150 buildings. Jordan's army was clearly humiliated in the process.

3. The Israeli attack badly damaged Hussain's position at home. It made him vulnerable to attack by disaffected elements of his population, who argue that his policy of peaceful co-existence with Israel has been dictated by the US and has proved a failure. There is a glaring contrast between Israeli treatment of Jordan and of Syria, which had severely provoked the Israelis, had received public Soviet support, and had been left alone by Tel Aviv's army. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)\* is now redoubling its pressure for the establishment of Palestinian military units in Jordanian border villages, a move Hussain has

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\* The PLO is a radical organization, established by agreement of the Arab rulers during the recently-ended period of Arab harmony. It is strongly supported by the UAR, which grants it extensive radio and other privileges.

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resisted because such units would not be under his control. The pressures in the Jordanian Armed Forces for retaliation against Israel are very high.

4. Hussain is aware that such feelings exist and will probably try to propitiate both military and civilian elements by stationing significant army units, including armor, on the West Bank of the Jordan River. He may also make a political gesture such as changing his Prime Minister. Hussain probably feels he cannot for the present use his security forces to prevent Syrian-trained saboteurs from operating through Jordan into Israel. The result will probably be an increase in sabotage incidents, which in turn may result in further major Israeli retaliations. Should such a raid occur in the next few months, Hussain would almost certainly feel compelled to retaliate, although he would probably try to keep Jordanian military action on a limited scale. He is aware that retaliation carries the risk of an expanded conflict, which could involve the bulk of his army, a process in which the latter would almost certainly be defeated.

5. The Israeli raid has caused extensive grumbling and discontented talk directed at the regime, but only one

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demonstration so far -- at Hebron on 15 November. Emotions are running high, however -- this is the worst single incident since Suez -- and there could be disturbances in major towns and cities in Jordan. It would be particularly difficult for the regime to control demonstrations directed against Israel, and they could easily be diverted against the King. In this superheated atmosphere the prospects for an attempted coup or assassination cannot be ruled out.

6. The reactions of Jordan's Arab neighbors have been mixed. The Syrians have severely criticized Hussain for failing to deal strongly with Israel, but Cairo has been very restrained. Nasser is aware that if Hussain retaliated with a military strike at Israel, Cairo could be faced with a choice of coming to Jordan's support or of losing much prestige by staying aloof. The Syrians, on the other hand, can be expected to continue to train saboteurs and dispatch them to Israel through Jordan. They are intent upon causing trouble in both countries.

7. Even if the Jordanian regime gets through the immediate crisis, Hussain's position appears to have been damaged to an extent we cannot yet fully assess. He has never been popular,

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and even at his best probably commands the allegiance of not more than a quarter to a third of the population. Hence, the regime's continuity requires that it not suffer too many public defeats in close succession. Failure of the regime to respond militarily to incidents occurring in the near future would almost certainly stimulate more determined plotting within the Armed Forces as well as widespread public disorder.

8. For some time, Hussain will feel compelled to take a harder line toward Israel. He will be forced into a military buildup, both for greater border security and to keep the military happy. He will certainly turn to the US for more military hardware and faster delivery. He will seek and probably get Saudi money to buy arms. If he does not obtain substantial help from these sources and if internal pressures increase, he will try to repair his relations with the radical Arab states and may turn to the Soviets for economic aid and possibly for arms. Tension along the border will almost certainly remain high, incidents are likely to be frequent, and Hussain's future will to a great degree depend on the scope and nature of Syrian and Israeli initiatives in this respect. Hussain himself is most unlikely to approach the question of Israeli-Jordanian relations as openmindedly and as positively as he has in the past.

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9. The Israeli raid seems illogical and miscalculated to us, and there is evidence that it seems so to some segments of opinion in Israel as well. On the whole, and in the absence of further evidence, we think it most likely that the Israeli act was one of genuine retaliation, determined to be necessary to satisfy Israeli opinion, and (in the Israeli view) to throw fear into the Arabs and restrain them from further forays into Israel. As for why the Israelis attacked Jordan instead of Syria, one major concern was the greater military costs of an incursion into Syria. A decision was probably made some weeks ago to stage a major raid into Jordan as soon as a pretext arose. It also appears likely that Israel wished to avoid attacking Syria because of Syria's close relations with the USSR and Israel's desire not to worsen relations with that great power, especially in view of the large Jewish population in the USSR.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

[Redacted Signature]

SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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