

Memoirs and autobiographies of political leaders, it goes without saying, are important sources for the historian. Not that they are renowned for the accuracy and completeness of the stories they tell. Characteristically, they rarely indulge in candid self-criticism. (In his *White House Years* Henry Kissinger comments sardonically, “I am being frank about myself in this book. I tell of my first mistake on page 850.”) Much of what we find in such books reflects what their authors wished to realize rather than their actual accomplishments. Yet, the subjective ways in which their narratives perceive situations, evaluate developments and judge people are in themselves hard facts for the historian. Their texts inevitably expose traits of their personality and always contribute valuable information about themselves and their times.

This applies also to the books published by the Jordanian monarchs. All three of them authored their personal stories (assisted as they were by professional writers): Abdullah I published *Mudhakkirati* (*My Memoirs*) in 1945, to be supplemented by the *Takmilah* in 1951; Hussein gave us his *Uneasy Lies the Head* in 1962; and now we have Abdullah II’s *Our Last Best Chance*, published, like his father’s book, a decade after his ascension to the throne. While it stands to reason that the three authors did not ignore the possible role of their books in establishing a wishful place in future historiography, they were driven by a more immediate objective: defending and projecting their policies, particularly in regional affairs. The books are also designed to radiate a positive image of these leaders—mainly with an eye toward Western publics but toward domestic constituencies as well (through the Arabic versions).

King Abdullah II explicitly defines his reason for writing the book. “The Middle East,” he writes in the Preface, “is facing a moment of real crisis” generated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and unless the present opportunities to reach a settlement are seized, “we will see another war in our region—most likely worse than those that have gone before.” This warning is the leitmotif of the book and is clearly pronounced in its title. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Abdullah’s concern. The persistence of the conflict harbors impending threats to the stability of the Jordanian Kingdom, and its resolution is a priority national interest. If sounding this alarm, proposing ways to reach a
settlement, and pointing out steps that Jordan has been taking to this end enhances the image of the King as a constructive player in the Middle Eastern arena, this may be regarded as added value.

Abdullah expresses in his book a clear commitment to the Palestinian-Israeli two-state solution and relates in detail the actions he took to advance it. He participated in all the forums that were convened to break the deadlock and held intensive talks with the relevant parties. The King takes credit for floating the idea of the “road map” in 2002 and, more significantly, for promoting the concept of the Arab Peace Initiative in the same year. He claims that the plan had already been outlined by his father but at the time it did not gain momentum. Abdullah revived it and advanced it in talks with the Egyptians and the Saudis, after which it surfaced as the “Saudi initiative” to be adopted at the Arab League conference in Beirut. Abdullah continued supporting the Initiative, even when other Arabs became skeptical, and in the subsequent meetings of Arab leaders he struggled against attempts to revoke it. The Arab summit delegated Jordan (and Egypt) to promote Israeli acceptance of the Initiative, and Abdullah pursued this task in his talks with Israeli leaders and public opinion formers as well as through interviews in the media. He follows this undertaking in his book as well, calling upon the Israelis to support the two-state solution and accept the Arab Peace Initiative. Having despaired of the present Israeli leadership, Abdullah directly addresses “the people of Israel,” telling them, “do not let your politicians endanger your nation’s security […] each of you can make a decision to choose peace” (p. 326). Yet he is not overly hopeful: “People on both sides had lost faith in the process,” he sadly observes, and there has been “an alarming erosion of public support for negotiations” (p. 320).

Throughout the book, Abdullah manifests disillusionment and gloom.

Not much is said about Jordanian-Israeli peace. Abdullah shared with the architects of the peace treaty the vision of regional prosperity through economic cooperation and the emergence of a “Middle Eastern Benelux,” but, he says, the cumulative experience did not support expectations for its realization. The high hopes that were generated by the treaty dwindled, especially after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Abdullah describes the bilateral relations that exist today as “strained” (and in some recent interviews he also referred to them as “cold peace”).

The complexities of Jordanian-Palestinian relations do not find adequate expression in the book beyond the emphatic endorsement of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. As for the Palestinians in Jordan, Abdullah maintains that once a Palestinian state is established they will have a choice: to move to Palestine or remain Jordanian citizens. Yasser Arafat, he tells us,