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onsequences of Displacement after the Gulf Crisis: A Study of the Responses of 207 Displaced Palestinian and Jordanian Workers

by
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Abstract

Throughout the war period and immediately thereafter, punitive measures were instituted against Jordanian nationals working in the Gulf; hundreds of thousands were dismissed from their jobs without compensation, and many more were expelled from the Gulf, leaving behind personal belongings, as well as bitter memories.

The purpose of this study is to: (1) investigate the effects of the Gulf Crisis on the amount of annual contributions to Jordan's economy by Gulf workers; (2) measure the amount of property loss incurred by Gulf workers as a result of the displacement; (3) examine the duration of unemployment caused among the displaced workers; and (4) measure attitudinal changes among the displaced workers regarding their economic future and the future of Jordan's economy.



Introduction

Without a doubt, the impact the Gulf Crisis had on the Middle East goes beyond the immediate actors involved in the conflict. That some Arab states decided to stay on the sidelines by refusing to send troops to participate in the war effort against Iraq did not help them avoid some of the consequences the crisis has created. A case in point is Jordan.

Unlike Syria, Egypt, or Morocco, for example, the Jordanian monarch adopted a relatively neutral stand vis-a-vis the conflict in



the Gulf: he repeatedly called upon Iraq to withdraw its troops from Kuwait, and at the same time, at least as far as the public record demonstrates, called upon the Gulf regimes and the United States to give conflict resolution through peaceful means a chance. On more than one occasion he warned against the dire ecological, military, political, and socioeconomic consequences the war could create. He appealed to rationality on all sides, Iraq not excluded.

Yet, long before the war started, Jordan was subjected to severe criticisms by Gulf rulers as well as by officials in the Bush administration. Moreover, the Gulf countries, most notably Saudi Arabia, decided to take punitive measures against Jordan: oil shipments to the kingdom were seriously interrupted and diplomatic relations with the Gulf countries were strained. Throughout the war period and immediately thereafter, harsher punitive measures were instituted against Jordanian nationals working in the Gulf; hundreds of thousands were dismissed from their jobs without compensation, and many more were expelled from the Gulf, leaving behind personal belongings, as well as bitter memories.¹

Following the Gulf Crisis, it was believed that the economy of Jordan was destined to face burdens and harsh conditions on more than one level. First, workers who used to work in the Gulf would no longer be able to pour sizeable portions of their income into Jordan's economy. The revival of Jordan's economy during the summer holidays would become a thing of the past. Second, the returning labor force would more likely overwhelm housing conditions, educational institutions, and public-service offices and, more importantly, cause unemployment to skyrocket. Third, the increasing demand for goods and services would lead to the rise of inflation rates and would make products scarcer. Fourth, the rise in unemployment and inflation rates could produce negative social results: boredom accompanied by bitter memories could very well be translated into psychological depression and/or crime. Fifth, the cutoff or the reduction of Gulf foreign aid could lead to the radicalization of popular sentiments in Jordan, a development which, if it were to occur, could destabilize the functioning of governmental institutions.

A comprehensive investigation of all these questions is beyond the scope of this study, however. Rather, the purpose of this study is to: (1) investigate the effects of the Gulf Crisis on the amount of annual contributions to Jordan's economy by Gulf workers; (2) measure the amount of property loss incurred by Gulf workers as a result of the displacement; (3) examine the duration of unemployment caused among the displaced workers; and (4) measure attitudinal changes



among the displaced workers regarding their economic future and the future of Jordan's economy.

The results of this study have been obtained by surveying 207 displaced Palestinian and Jordanian workers. It should be noted here, however, that the overwhelming majority of the more than 500,000 displaced workers are Palestinians carrying Jordanian citizenship.

Research Method

The method of data collection used in this study is what W. R. Borg and M. D. Gall refer to as "survey research," which they define as "a method of collecting information to explore relationships between different variables."²

The instrument is designed to measure demographic, socioeconomic characteristics and economic indicators relevant to: (1) previous country of employment; (2) number of years employed in the Gulf; (3) gender; (4) age; (5) type of employment; (6) educational level; (7) income status during the pre- and post-Gulf Crisis period; (8) estimated value of personal investment; (9) estimated value of property owned in the Gulf and Jordan; (10) length of unemployment since the Gulf Crisis; and (11) attitudes towards employment opportunities abroad.

The instrument was constructed into two versions: English and Arabic. For the purpose of this research, the Arabic version was used because it is the native language of Jordan. Attached to each questionnaire was a cover letter which explained the intent of the study.

The data was compiled between December 15 and 28, 1991. Survey assistants were selected to help with the data collection. The assistants and participants were informed that the surveying was strictly on a voluntary basis and they had the right to decline. All assistants received orientation regarding the questionnaire and instructions with respect to the steps in collecting the data. The participants were randomly selected by the survey assistants and some were interviewed in person. The assistants visited different locations to identify displaced workers and personally distributed and collected the questionnaires.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

As can be seen in table 1, a total of 207 displaced workers in Jordan were surveyed: 185 Males and five females volunteered to



participate in the study. Seventeen respondents did not identify their gender.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Jordanians
and Palestinian Gulf Employees

Gender	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	185	89.4	97.4
Female	5	2.4	2.6
Not specified	17	8.2	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Age	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Under 20 yrs	4	1.9	2.1
21-30 years	15	7.2	7.8
31-40 years	33	15.9	17.1
41-50	88	42.5	45.6
Over 51	53	25.6	27.5
Not specified	14	6.8	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Education	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
No HS diploma	90	43.5	43.9
HS diploma	35	16.9	17.1
2-3 yrs. university or technical school	25	12.1	12.2
B.A./university graduate	45	21.7	22.0
Graduate school: M.A., Ph.D., or equivalent	10	4.8	4.9
Not specified	2	1.0	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Last employ- ment position held	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Government	134	64.7	64.7
Private sector	47	22.7	22.7
Professional	26	12.6	12.6
Total	207	100.0	100.0



The majority of the displaced workers surveyed were over 40 years of age. Forty-six percent were between the ages of 41 and 50 and 28 percent were over 51. Thirty-three (17 percent) displaced workers were between the ages of 31 and 40.

Further, the data reveals that 44 percent (N=90) of the displaced workers had no high-school education. Seventeen percent (35) were high-school graduates. Twenty-two percent held bachelor degrees and 12 percent either attended two- or three- year colleges or had some type of technical training.

The majority (65 percent) of the displaced workers were employed in government positions, and 23 percent worked in the private sector.

The overwhelming majority (88 percent) of the displaced workers were employed in Kuwait (see table 2). Seven percent indicated Saudi Arabia. More interesting, 78 percent had been employed for sixteen or more years in the gulf.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Jordanian and Palestinian Former Gulf Employees

Country of previous employment in Gulf	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Saudi Arabia	14	6.8	6.8
Kuwait	183	88.4	88.4
U.A.E.	5	2.4	2.4
Other	5	2.4	2.4
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Years employed in Gulf	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
1-3	7	3.4	3.4
4-6	9	4.3	4.4
7-10	12	5.8	5.8
11-15	17	8.2	8.3
16 or more	1	77.8	78.2
Not specified	1	0.5	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0



Socioeconomic Characteristics

Findings shown in table 3 reveal that seven percent of the respondents were making an annual income of more than JD 20,000 before they were displaced from the Gulf; only 4 percent of the respondents were making an annual income of JD 20,000 after they were displaced. ("JD" refers to Jordanian dinar. Roughly each JD=U.S. \$1.50.) Eight percent of the respondents reported that their annual income before they were displaced from the Gulf ranged from JD 16,000 to 20,000. In comparison, only 1 percent were able to maintain this income level after the displacement. More interesting to note is that while 22 percent of the respondents reported that their annual income in the Gulf before they were displaced ranged from JD 11,000 to 15,000, none was able to maintain this income level.

Table 3
Socioeconomic Characteristics of Jordanian
and Palestinian Former Gulf Employees

Last Annual Income While Employed in Gulf	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than JD 5,000	68	32.9	34.5
JD 5,000-10,000	56	27.1	28.4
JD 11,000-15,000	44	21.3	22.3
JD 16,000-20,000	16	7.7	8.1
More than JD 20,000	13	6.3	6.6
Not Specified	10	4.8	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Current Annual Income	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than JD 5,000	120	58.0	58.8
JD 5,000-10,000	13	6.3	6.4
JD 16,000-20,000	2	1.0	1.0
More than JD 20,000	9	4.3	4.4
Other	60	29.0	29.4
Not Specified	3	1.4	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Furthermore, while 28 percent of the respondents indicated that their annual income before they were displaced ranged from JD 5,000 to 10,000, only 6 percent managed to maintain this income



level. More striking is that while 35 percent of the respondents reported that their annual income before they were displaced from the Gulf was less than JD 5,000, the number of displaced workers in this income level went up to 59 percent. An even more striking result is that 29 percent of the respondents, instead of choosing an appropriate answer which accurately describes their income level after they became displaced, responded with comments reflecting signs of despair and anguish. Such comments lead these researchers to draw the assumption that the annual income for this segment of displaced workers amounted to JD zero. In sum, 65 percent of the surveyed Jordanian and Palestinian workers employed in the Gulf before the crisis had an annual income of JD 5,000 or more, compared to only 12 percent after the displacement.

Discussion of Research Findings

In order to investigate the impact the Gulf Crisis has had on Jordan's economy, a study of economic indicators will be attempted by answering the research questions below. Analyses from frequencies will be used.

1. To what extent did the Jordanian and Palestinian workers employed in the Gulf contribute to the Jordanian economy before and after the crisis?
2. What was the extent of personal loss incurred by the Jordanian and Palestinian workers displaced from the Gulf after the crisis?
3. What was the duration of unemployment caused among the displaced Jordanian and Palestinian workers?
4. How did the Gulf Crisis affect the attitudes of the displaced workers toward their own economic future and the future of Jordan's economy?

Estimates of Annual Contributions to the Jordanian Economy by Gulf Workers before and after the Crisis

As can be seen in table 4, 8 percent of the respondents indicated that they invested more than JD 8,000 annually in the Jordanian economy before the Gulf Crisis. (Investment included, among other things, savings, consumer purchases, and real estate.) Thirty percent of the respondents indicated that their annual investment before the crisis ranged from JD 2,000 to 8,000. The majority of the respondents (62 percent) stated that their annual investment in the Jordanian



Table 4
Economic Indicators

Estimated Amount of Money Invested Annually in Jordan's Economy before August 1990*			
Dinars	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 2,000	95	45.9	62.1
2,000-4,000	29	14.0	19.0
4,100-6,000	7	3.4	4.6
6,100-8,000	10	4.8	6.5
More than 8,000	12	5.8	7.8
Not specified	54	26.1	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Estimated Amount of Money Invested in Jordan's Economy between August 1990 and August 1991*			
Dinars	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 2,000	100	48.3	65.4
2,000-4,000	20	9.7	13.1
4,100-6,000	19	9.2	12.4
6,100-8,000	5	2.4	3.3
More than 8,000	9	4.3	5.9
Not Specified	54	26.1	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

*Investments include savings, consumer purchases, real estate purchases, etc.

Estimated Value of Savings and Property Owned in Gulf while Employed There			
Dinars	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 10,000	92	44.4	47.7
10,000-15,000	45	21.7	23.3
16,000-20,000	20	9.7	10.4
21,000-25,000	4	1.9	2.1
More than 25,000	32	15.5	16.6
Not specified	14	6.8	*****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Estimated Value of Saving and Property Brought to Jordan from Gulf after August 1990			
Dinars	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 10,000	107	51.7	56.0
10,000-15,000	27	13.0	14.1
16,000-20,000	25	12.1	13.1
21,000-25,000	7	3.4	3.7
More than 25,000	25	12.1	13.1
Not Specified	16	7.7	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0



economy was less than JD 2,000 before the crisis.

Between August 1990 and August 1991, it was found that there was a slight decline in the number of persons who managed to invest more than JD 8,000 in the Jordanian economy (6 percent). However, there was no decline in the number of people who managed to invest JD 2,000-8,000 in the Jordanian economy after the Gulf Crisis (29 percent). While this finding might come as a major surprise at first glance, the uncertainty created by the crisis apparently led displaced workers to try to maintain the same level of investment they had in the past. Many returning workers had to purchase a house or an apartment in Jordan upon displacement.

Furthermore, findings from the data show that there was a slight increase in the number of those who invested less than JD 2,000 in the Jordanian economy after August 1990 (65 percent), when compared to the precrisis period.

Estimated Value of Personal Property Loss Incurred as a Result of the Displacement

As can also be seen in table 4, while employed in the Gulf, 17 percent of the Jordanian and Palestinian workers owned more than JD 25,000 worth of property and savings. When forced out of the Gulf, the number of workers who managed to retrieve and bring back to Jordan property and savings worth more than JD 25,000 dropped to 13 percent. Thirty-six percent of the respondents stated that they owned an estimated value of property and savings ranging from JD 10,000 to 25,000 before the crisis. Only 31 percent of the same people managed to bring back to Jordan property and savings of the same value after the crisis. The majority of the surveyed workers (48 percent) indicated that they owned property and savings at an estimated value of less than JD 10,000. When the crisis broke out, the number of workers in this category went up to 56 percent.

The Employment Status of the Displaced Workers after the Crisis

The Gulf Crisis seems to have had a tremendous impact on the work conditions of displaced workers (see table 5). The majority (55 percent) of the respondents indicated that they had been without a job for more than twelve months since the beginning of the Gulf Crisis. Seventeen percent of the respondents reported that they had been unemployed for ten to twelve months. Of importance in this context is that when the unemployed were asked the question as to



how long they expect to remain without a job, 30 percent of them were somewhat optimistic in the hope of returning to some type of employment within twelve months. Twenty-eight of the respondents were pessimistic: they expect to remain without a job for more than two years. A third category of the respondents, who were the majority (36 percent), can be termed as realistic. Given the nature of the Arab/Muslim culture, this group of displaced workers resigned itself to Allah's will: "Only Allah knows," they answered when asked how long they expect to remain unemployed.

Table 5
Economic Indicators of Employment

Number of Months Unemployed since August 1990			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 2 months	21	10.1	11.1
2-5 months	13	6.3	6.8
6-9 months	20	9.7	10.5
10-12 months	32	15.5	16.8
More than 12 months	104	50.2	54.7
Not specified	17	8.2	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

If Unemployed, Length of Time Expected to Remain without a Job

	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than 6 months	38	18.4	18.5
7-12 months	24	11.6	11.7
13-18 months	3	1.4	1.5
19-24 months	8	3.9	3.9
More than 2 years	58	28.0	28.3
Others	74	35.7	36.1
Not specified	2	1.0	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

The Impact of the Crisis on Workers' Attitudes towards Their Personal Economic Future and the Future of Jordan's Economy

Without a doubt, an event of the magnitude of the Gulf Crisis is expected to have a tremendous psychological effect on those involved. It is certainly safe to say that a development like the expul-



sion of hundreds of thousands of Jordanian and Palestinian workers from the Gulf will have an impact on the attitudes of those displaced. When asked the question "How do you feel about your economic future?", 29 percent of the displaced workers (see table 6), responded that they were either pessimistic or very pessimistic. Thirty-five percent of the respondents stated that they felt uncertain about their economic future. Surprisingly, more (36 percent) of the displaced workers were either optimistic or very optimistic about their economic future.

Table 6
Social Economic Indicators
and Characteristics of Employment

Would Take Opportunity to Go to Another Country for Employment			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	158	76.3	76.7
No	48	23.2	23.3
Not specified	1	0.5	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

First Choice of Location for Job			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Europe	9	4.3	4.4
Country of your previous employment in the Gulf	66	31.9	32.5
Palestine	42	20.3	20.7
U.S.A.	31	15.0	15.3
Other	7	3.4	3.4
Not applicable	48	23.2	23.6
Not specified	4	1.9	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0

Feelings as to Economic Future			
	Number	Percent	Valid Percent
Very optimistic	22	10.6	10.7
Optimistic	52	25.1	25.4
Uncertain	72	34.8	35.1
Pessimistic	30	14.5	14.6
Very pessimistic	29	14.0	14.1
Not specified	2	1.0	****
Total	207	100.0	100.0



A closer examination of workers' attitudes towards their personal economic future and the future of Jordan's economy, however, reveals that if given the opportunity to go to another country for employment, 158 (77 percent) of the 207 respondents answered "yes." Of the 158 respondents, 33 percent expressed that their first choice of country for employment is their previous country of employment in the Gulf. Twenty-one percent indicated that their first choice would be to go to Palestine. Only 15 percent expressed their first choice to be the United States.

Conclusion

The Palestinian and Jordanian work force was quite active and productive in Kuwait's infrastructure. For three decades before the Gulf Crisis, it played a major role in the modernization of Kuwait. Kuwait's economy enjoyed the benefit of Palestinian and Jordanian expertise. At the same time, however, the more than 500,000 stateless Palestinians working in Kuwait contributed to the well-being of families and institutions, both in the occupied territories and in Jordan.

Their expulsion from the Gulf, particularly from Kuwait, after the crisis broke out brought them face to face with the realities of life: the psychological impact of displacement and the effects of having meager resources or none at all.

The Jordanian economy, which for many years benefitted from the various forms of financial contributions made by Gulf workers, will have to bear its share of the burden as well. Instead of being an asset to Jordan's economy as they certainly were before the crisis, the displaced workers became more of a liability: Many of them are unemployed and expect to remain as such, "only Allah knows" for how long.

Notes

1. See, among others, *White Paper: Jordan and the Gulf Crisis, August 1990-March 1991* (Amman: The Government of the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan, 1991).
2. W. R. Borg and M. D. Gall, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (New York: Longman, 1979), 282.