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Aviation Jordan
Aviation is playing a star role in the fast-growing Jordanian economy, encouraged to do so by King Hussein himself. CHARLES GILSON interviews the King and reports from Amman, Aqaba and Mafraq on develop-ments in the air force, air academy, airline and civil aviation directorate.

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URELY NONE OF THE world's leaders can have more
influence over the development of aviation in his
country than King Hussein of Jordan. Hereditary
ruler of the Hashemite Kingdom, he is not only an accom-
plished member of that select band of royal pilots (with about 3.000hr to his credit on fixed-wing and rotary types), but he is also a one-man power base who has always taken an active role right across the aviation board.
Jordan's economy, in spite of an uncharacteristic lack of oil, is expanding fast—it is significant that probably more Lebanese businessmen have fled troubled Beirut for cos-mopolitan Amman than for any other Middle Eastern capital. Encouraged by this atmosphere of growth, King Hussein has plans which could make his country the aero-nautical centre of the Arab world. Tn an interview granted exclusively to Flighl, he reviews what has already been achieved and describes his aspirations for the future. Jordan's aeronautical education requirements are met largely by the thriving Royal Jordanian Air Academy. What are the prospects for an expansion of the country's training facilities? "I am very keen that Jordan should be the civil and military training centre for the area," says King Hussein. A university of the air will in fact come into exist-ence on January f, 1977, with the academy forming its main part, even though the scope of activities will even-tually be very much wider than at present. The King is "extremely pleased with what has already been achieved in the training of Jordanian and foreign civil and military pilots.''
How are plans for the air university to be put into practice? "Our aim is to develop a high standard of pilot and technician in all areas of flying, including the rotary field, equal to those of the most advanced nations. In the civilian field alone, with the tremendous growth of equip-ment in the area, the need for very large numbers of the highest-calibre flight crew, engineers, maintenance men and so on has become obvious and is now urgent."

King Hussein of Jordan is a practising fixed-wing and helicopter pilot
with about 3,000hr in his logbook, as he demonstrated to the author
(centre) during a short flight over Amman in his personal Riley Dove.
At right is Capt Lee Jones, director of the Royal Jordanian Air Academy

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With the emphasis clearly on training personnel at this stage, it may be eight or ten years before the university is fully realised. But the King makes it clear that the idea is to build up an all-round ability—in the form of both facili-ties and people—to do major maintenance and overhaul work on engines as well as airframes. The university and the growing capability of the airline and air force would serve the needs of many of the surrounding, aeronautically less advanced Middle East countries.

Looking even further ahead, how likely is the establish-ment of a Jordanian assembly plant and eventually a manufacturing industry? "Establishing a factory to assemble aircraft," says the King, "is not impossible to visualise. However, we have always concentrated on im-proving our technical foundation and are thus more and more able to service aircraft to all levels. But the base is there for any future expansion or new ventures."

Air-defence system
King Hussein speaks surprisingly freely about plans for his air force. With negotiations for a new air-defence system poised delicately between an American and a Russian solution at the time of our interview, and with Saudi Arabia putting up most of the money (see Flight for August 7, page 306, he told me that he thought the Hawk deal would go ahead. This has since been confirmed, the $540 million package consisting of 14 missile batteries, ground-based Vulcan guns and a large volume of associated equipment and support.
One of the supposed advantages of buying a Russian system would have been integration with the neighbouring Syrian network. Although economic and political ties be-tween Jordan and Syria have recently been growing stronger, supported by an agreement whereby Jordanian troops would join their neighbours in the event of an out-side attack, detailed questions about further military co-operation between the two remained politely unanswered by King Hussein. He observed, however, that "all in all, the price of the American system and that of the Russian proposal worked out about the same."
The Royal Jordanian Air Force is essentially standardised on the F-5 series for its front line. Is this sufficient for all the roles foreseen or are other, more specialised, combat aircraft required? "The Northrop F-5," says the King, "is at the moment the main aircraft used for both ground sup-port and interception. The F-104s are now fairly old, how-ever, and will not last a great deal longer, so for the future we are interested in a more advanced and modern aircraft to fill mainly the intercepter role. The F-5 will then be used primarily as the ground-support aircraft."
The new fighter is encompassed within expansion plans. "We are building up to a long-term figure of 176 combat aircraft [excluding rotary-wing]. The F-5 is very satisfac-tory and fulfils various roles within our requirements, but a new intercepter is necessary." The transport force too is to be enlarged: "We will probably continue with C-130s as they are such good workhorses."

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Anti-tank helicopters
King Hussein says that the other major expansion plan for the air force concerns helicopters. "As has been demon-strated, I believe that there is a very real place for the anti-tank helicopter in this area. The concept of parachut-ing troops on to a battlefield is now virtually dead all over the world and there is the trend towards achieving high mobility by transporting smaller groups of men in helicop-ters. So we shall need a medium-lift vehicle as well." Is the American, specialised, solution favoured over a more European, general-purpose aircraft? "It is all a matter of