

## What is the state of the knowledge economy in Jordan?

By Dr. Talal Abu Ghazaleh

We have a major decision to make in Jordan, which for the last year I have been trying to promote. In brief, it is the need to transform the country into a knowledge economy. I always compare this country to Finland. Jordanians like to look at the US and the UK, the great industrial countries, and take them as their role model. This is a waste of time. We are not China or the UK; we are a small country with some 9 million people.



Finland has a population of 6 million. We both have no natural resources. Finland's GDP is over USD230 billion. In contrast, Jordan's GDP is USD40 billion. There is no reason Jordan cannot reach a GDP level comparable to that of Finland's; we need the political will and corresponding political decisions. Unfortunately, governments address short-term issues. Finland has decided to address long-term issues and invented the tools to become a knowledge economy.

Finland is leading changes in education globally. If we take the model of Finland, we do not need the World Bank or the IMF. We will not have a government deficit, nor will we need to take loans. We will not need to worry about demonstrations or unemployment. If we use this model, this is the short and long road to success. This is how we overcome our problems.

This is why I established the Talal Abu Ghazaleh Knowledge Forum, which has set a target for USD280-billion GDP by 2040. We are not dreamers; we are serious about planning for the future and making it happen.

We have problems in the economy, including the closure of borders, which makes Jordan like an economic prison. Without the effective opening of our borders to Syria and Iraq, the economy will not recover. In the absence of that, the only approach is to go digital, because the digital economy has no borders. We have not yet captured the enabling power of the digital economy. In 2001, one of my major assignments was to co-chair the UN ICT Task Force, which was concerned with developing strategies for such issues related to transforming into a digital economy. After that, I chaired the global alliance at the UN for ICT development.

Unfortunately, not much of that has been implemented in Jordan. Our government has been preoccupied with solving problems and not developing strategies for the future. People are talking about the problems, but no one is talking about how to transform the economy. Information technology is a tool, and the knowledge economy is the implementation of that tool for everything in our life.

AI is going to become even more popular, and it is already a dominant technology globally. Our intellectual property organization became the global leader for intellectual property protection because we captured the enabling power of ICT. If Jordan wants to be a global leader, we have to do the same as a country. I am concerned that this has not yet become the mission of the country. What I would like the world to know is that we are aware of the change we need to make Jordan a better country. We will make this change.

**How does the situation in Jordan fit into a broader global context?**

I have issued a warning that we are heading for a major global crisis in 2020, and being an election year, and an expected world war. It does not take a Harvard graduate to know that the US has eyes for only one country in the world, China. And some have predicted this since 1985, when I attended a seminar at the National Science Academy in Washington DC about where the US will be in 2020. There were three conclusions. One was that China would be the competing superpower economically. Second, if China has economic power, it has full power. Third, that we should stop this by any means. The objective of the manufactured war will not be to occupy or invade or destroy China, but to force China to sit in a bilateral meeting to develop a new world order. Indeed, we need a new world order and new leadership, which is nonexistent at the moment.

As a result of this war and agreement, a global Marshall Plan will emerge that will place this region at the center of the global renaissance, foremost

because this area is the most dire need of reconstruction. It is the most destroyed. Second, the region has the financial resources, which will serve the financial interest of the powers involved. What is delaying the end of the Syrian war is how to share the reconstruction privileges. China has immense resources, and what we have seen is only the tip of the iceberg. We will also see the UK emerging as a similar power like Russia for China.

Two or three years in the life of nations are nothing. And if the issues between the US and China are dealt with, we will see great potential for humanity.

Another critical piece of the global context is climate change. In 1999, I was commissioned by the Secretary General of the UN to draft environmental accounting standards to be imposed on all. I was at the time the chairman of ISAR, the “UN Intergovernmental Accounting and Reporting Standards Commission” group of experts. When we finished the report, we were asked to put it on the shelf because the US would never agree to implement such accountability standards because the liability of damages to be imposed on companies would be disastrous. Now the issue has become serious, and there is talk in congress about an existential risk for humanity in 12 years. The main premises of the report have not changed, but now I am suggesting that this issue can be solved with the advent of AI. There are 8,000 AI scientists in America, and 6,000 in Russia. The solution is to put a team together from both countries. They can change pollutants into non-polluting products through AI in one year, and this is why I am pioneering an AI consulting company.