

An Evil Wind from the East?

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Jordan's stability is being undermined by mass demonstrations outside the Israeli embassy in Amman, organized by the National Forum for Supporting the Resistance and spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. Iranian subversion, and the use of the Hashemite Kingdom for smuggling weapons and money to terrorist organizations in the West Bank are also contributing to the instability. Concern that this destabilizing of Jordan could lead to the deployment of Iran and its proxies along the Israel–Jordan border should spur Israel to avoid a public confrontation with the Jordanian royal house over its harsh criticism of Israel over the war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Israel should also be mindful of the kingdom's existential needs and should send positive messages to Amman via clandestine channels.

Since March 25, around 150,000 Jordanians—mostly of Palestinian origin—have been participating in angry demonstrations outside the Israeli embassy in the capital city of Amman. These demonstrations are a show of solidarity with Hamas and the Palestinian people. The crowds chant the names of Hamas's military leader, Mohammed Deif, and the military wing's spokesman, Abu Obaida. They express loyalty to Hamas's cause by shouting slogans like "They say Hamas is a terrorist organization; all of Jordan is Hamas," "Abu Obaida, we are at your service; the Jordanian people is with you," and "Sword versus sword; we are Mohammed Deif's people."

In addition to chants in support of Hamas and the resistance movement, insults have been hurled at Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, whom the masses have referred to as a "dirty traitor." Moreover, there have been calls to annul the Wadi Araba Treaty—how the Jordanians refer to the peace deal that was signed between Israel and the late King Hussein at the Wadi Araba border crossing in October 1994, alongside calls to end all aspects of normalization between the two countries. At the same time, the Jordanian movement to boycott Israel has also been revived and is now focused on opposing the export of Jordanian vegetables to Israel, revoking the gas and energy agreements, and closing the land border between the two countries to the transfer of goods. During the demonstrations, there have also been calls from the "resistance" to take up arms, cross the border and help liberate Palestine, not only in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank.

The protests are being organized by "Young Jordanian" groups, which are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as workers' unions and professional organizations representing engineers, doctors, and lawyers who are aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood. These groups have been joined by independent Palestinian activists, who use social media to recruit others to join the protests. They also document

the protests and share updates about upcoming events, fundraising efforts, and calls for the release of detainees.

This recent wave of protests in Jordan was sparked by a false report on Al Jazeera, which claimed that IDF soldiers had raped Palestinian women during a military operation at Shifa Hospital in the Gaza Strip in March. Four days after publishing the report, the network retracted it and apologized, admitting that the testimony was false, and removed it from all of the network's online platforms. But four days is an eternity when it comes to social media, and the damage had already been done. Jordanian Palestinians took to the streets immediately to protect the honor of Palestinian women, organizing the most widespread public protests held in Jordan on behalf of Gaza since the outbreak of the war on October 7.

King Abdullah II of Jordan allowed the protestors to “let off steam” and express their solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, assuming that the Hashemite Kingdom's security services would be able to control the intensity of the protests and contain the events. He also expected that these protests would last only a few days before dying down. However, after the special Tarawih prayers for the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, several thousand Palestinian Jordanians took to the streets of Amman and gathered at two main locations: the square where the Israeli embassy is located and the land crossing for goods between Israel and Jordan. What started as a message of support for their brethren in Gaza and a demand to end the fighting quickly turned into rallies in support of Hamas and the Palestinian resistance. While Hamas flags are barred under Jordanian law, the protestors held up green placards as a symbol of their support for the organization; some also displayed the Hamas flag on the screens of their smartphones, which they waved above their heads. The number of people participating in the protests gradually increased, and there were more calls for armed resistance and a popular intifada. Some protestors even attempted to break into the Israeli embassy and set it ablaze.

At the same time, King Abdullah—apparently personally—gave permission for Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas's political wing who lives in Qatar, to enter Jordan and deliver a speech in honor of International Women's Day before a group of ardent supporters. In his speech, Mashal further ignited tensions, resulting in a flood of criticism against Hamas on traditional and social media platforms in Jordan for fomenting unrest among the Jordanian people. In response, Hamas said that Mashal's comments had been misunderstood, emphasizing that he had no intention of interfering in the kingdom's domestic issues and rather wanted to thank the Jordanian people and their leaders for their support of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, due to concerns that the situation could escalate, the security forces were given the green light to carry out a series of arrests of Muslim Brotherhood activists, Hamas supporters, and union leaders.

It is important to remember that any threat to Jordan's stability would be a golden opportunity for the Iranian-led axis of resistance to interfere in the kingdom's affairs

and open up an additional front against Israel. On April 1, Abu Ali al-Askari, the head of security for Iraq's Kataib Hezbollah, issued the following statement: "The Islamic Resistance in Iraq has prepared . . . to equip our brothers, the Islamic Resistance in Jordan, to meet the needs of 12,000 fighters with light and medium weapons, anti-armor launchers, tactical missiles, millions of rounds of ammunition, and tons of explosives, so that we can be united, protect our Palestinian brothers, and avenge the honor of the Muslims murdered by the human apes and pigs [Israel]. We are ready to begin and as our initial response, we will cut off the roads between Jordan and Israel." A spokesperson for the Jordanian government stated that "Jordan has no desire to respond to militias whose hands are stained with blood and who are one of the reasons for instability in the region."

It seems highly likely that this statement by Kataib Hezbollah was coordinated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and is meant to undermine Jordan's stability by fueling public unrest against the royal house. While this serves to expand the borders of the conflict with Israel, at the same time, it could create additional corridors for smuggling arms and ammunition to terrorist groups in the West Bank.

The situation in Jordan raises several important issues, that activists across the Arab world are addressing:

1. **Will Jordan be at risk of falling into Iranian hands?** The extent of Iran's growing involvement in the Hashemite Kingdom is gradually being revealed from smuggling arms, fighters, and money to disseminating an ideology of division and chaos. This especially characterizes the discourse in Syria and Lebanon.
2. **Concern over the stability of the regime and the possible takeover of Jordan by the Muslim Brotherhood:** The concern that the fall of Jordan could lead to a domino effect and could undermine stability in the Gulf states is evident on the social media discourse in the Gulf states. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, spoke with King Abdullah about these developments, stressing that his country supports Jordan's efforts to safeguard security and stability in the kingdom. King Abdullah was even urged to annul the citizenship of some three million Palestinians living in Jordan who support Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.
3. **An anti-Palestinian Jordanian national discourse:** In the second week of the protests, a backlash emerged against the activity of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country among East Bank Jordanians. As part of this backlash, they highlighted their tribal identity and loyalty to the Hashemite Kingdom, as well as opposition to any protest activity that undermines Jordan's stability.

Conclusion

Nearly 30 years since the peace accord between Israel and Jordan was signed, the Jordanian public remains steadfast in its opposition to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, as well as to peace and normalization with Israel. Since March 25, mass demonstrations have taken place outside the Israeli embassy in Amman, organized by the National Forum for Supporting the Resistance and led by the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. These active protest groups that use Jordan as a platform for smuggling arms and money to terrorist organizations in the West Bank and the plans of Iraqi militias to actively interfere in Jordanian affairs have created a real and immediate threat to the stability of the Hashemite Kingdom. Any shockwaves that hit Jordan will have far-reaching and serious implications for Israel.

Israel needs to pay close attention to developments in its neighbor to the east. The possibility of instability in Jordan leading Iran and its proxies to deploy forces along the Israel–Jordan border—Israel’s longest border—should be enough to convince Israel’s leadership not to engage in a public argument with the Jordanian royal house concerning Israel’s actions in its war against Hamas in Gaza. Israel should consider the vital needs of the Hashemite Kingdom and should communicate positive messages to Amman via clandestine channels. Furthermore, Israel should respond favorably to Jordan’s initiative to increase humanitarian aid to Gaza, which would allow Amman to present the move as benefiting the people of Gaza and alleviating the pressure on its own the domestic front.

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