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# The Jordanian Response to the War on Gaza

Unit for Political Studies

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On 7 October 2023, Hamas' military wing, the Qassam Brigades, launched "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood," penetrating the boundaries of the Gaza Strip, which has been under siege by Israel since 2007, sending shockwaves through Israel and the world. Israel responded by declaring a full-scale war on the Gaza Strip, which has so far resulted in more than ten thousand martyrs and the widespread destruction of infrastructure and residential buildings. Jordan's response to the Israeli war on Gaza has received attention given the Kingdom's connection to the future of the Palestinian issue, its influence on any related developments, and its fears that Israel will perpetrate a mass expulsion of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

## I: Jordan's Relationship with Both Parties

Jordan deals with the Palestinian issue according to complex political, military, security, economic and demographic calculations. The official position is determined by several factors, most notably the nature of the relationship that links it with the main parties to the conflict, namely:

- **The Palestinian Authority:** Jordan's policy on Palestine is essentially based on the two-state solution, and therefore it supports the Palestinian Authority as one of the manifestations of this solution. Jordan does not miss an opportunity to express this position. The events of 7 October 2023 came to dispel any illusion that the Palestinian question could be marginalized despite beliefs that it had been transcended and that Jordan's role had also become irrelevant in the wake of Donald Trump's "deal of the Century", several Arab normalization agreements with Israel, and the extremist right-wing government in the Knesset. Its policies are based on annexing more of the occupied West Bank, accelerating settlement, and obstructing any path to a solution or negotiation with the Palestinians.
- **Israel:** Since the peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel in 1994, the relationship between the two countries has seen numerous crises.<sup>1</sup> Most of these resulted from Israeli policies rejecting any settlement of the Palestinian issue on the basis of "land for peace" formula, and the continuous attacks carried out by settlers under the protection of the Israeli government on holy sites in Jerusalem, which falls under the Hashemite "Custodianship". Nevertheless, the Wadi Araba treaty and the normalization of Jordanian relations with Israel has remained a cornerstone of Jordanian foreign policy and has governed its relationship with both Israel and the US.
- **Hamas:** Since expelling its leaders and closing its offices in Jordan early into the reign of King Abdullah II, Jordan has been dealing with the Hamas movement as a security, not a political, matter.<sup>2</sup> Hamas also coordinates its movements in Jordan with the Jordanian General Intelligence Service through its representative in Amman. The relationship between the two parties fluctuates

<sup>1</sup> "Reasons for Tense Relationship between the King of Jordan and Netanyahu," *Arabi 21*, 3/4/2021, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3SDxLsQ>

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, *The 'Islamic Solution' in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the Ventures of Democracy and Security* (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012), pp. 169 - 170.



depending on the political situation in the region. For example, King Abdullah received the former head of Hamas's political bureau, Khaled Mashal, in 2012 following Qatari mediation, and in 2021 Jordan allowed the entry of Khaled Mashal and Ismail Haniyeh to offer condolences following the passing of former Hamas leader Ibrahim Ghosheh.<sup>3</sup> However, the relationship remains generally lukewarm, and may sometimes become tense due to what Jordan refers to as Hamas' military activities on its territory. For example, the Jordanian security services arrested cadres affiliated with Hamas and put them on trial in 2015.<sup>4</sup> The Jordanian authorities also arrested a number of cadres affiliated with Hamas were accused of smuggling weapons into the West Bank last June.<sup>5</sup>

## II: The Jordanian Reaction to “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood”

In its first reaction to the events of 7 October, the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on the same day in which it called for “a halt to the escalation,” condemned “Israeli violations” against the Palestinian people and their Islamic and Christian holy sites and stressed “the necessity of restraint and the protection of civilians.”<sup>6</sup> The statement avoided outright condemnation of the operation or Hamas, and the official Jordanian position continued to move during the first days within the framework of “the necessity of de-escalation”; “emphasizing the two-state solution”, and “warning against any attempts at forced displacement,” without requesting an immediate ceasefire. This is what Jordan and Egypt worked on and was approved in a statement issued by a ministerial meeting of the Arab League held on 11 October 2023,<sup>7</sup> in response to Israeli calls, supported by the US, to deport Gazans from the northern Gaza Strip under the guise of opening “humanitarian corridors for civilians.” Likewise, this is the position that the King of Jordan emphasized during a visit he made to Egypt to discuss the Israeli aggression against Gaza,<sup>8</sup> considering an expulsion a red line.<sup>9</sup>

Israel's bombing of the al-Ahli (Baptist) hospital on 17 October provoked intense anger in the Jordanian streets, and massive demonstrations erupted in Amman, marching towards the Israeli embassy, which had been evacuated immediately after the events of 7 October without issuing a diplomatic statement. This had been considered a withdrawal of personnel working at the embassy for “security reasons”.<sup>10</sup> The number of demonstrators was estimated in the tens of thousands and was preceded

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ayyash, “Hamas, Jordan, and Ghosheh's Condolences,” *Al-Quds*, 30/8/2021, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/dCKPR>

<sup>4</sup> “Prison sentences for ‘supporting Hamas’ in Jordan,” *Al Jazeera*, 28/7/2015, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/djko7>

<sup>5</sup> “Jordan arrests 4 Palestinian resistance fighters: tense relations between Amman and Hamas,” *Al-Akhabar*, 24/6/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/qtFO8>

<sup>6</sup> “Jordan stresses the need to stop the dangerous escalation in Gaza and its surroundings,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7/10/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/40DZUlt>.

<sup>7</sup> “A meeting of the Council of the League of Arab States at the level of foreign ministers – an extraordinary session – to discuss ways of political action to stop the Israeli aggression and achieve security and peace.” League of Arab States, 11/10/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/479ZXrD>.

<sup>8</sup> “The King and the Egyptian President confirm their rejection of the policy of collective punishment on Gaza,” Royal Hashemite Court, 19/10/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/479ZXrD>.

<sup>9</sup> “During his chairmanship of a meeting with the General Command of the Armed Forces, Jordan's categorical rejection of any scenario aimed at displacing Palestinians,” Royal Hashemite Court, 10/17/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3sxp5K1>

<sup>10</sup> “Israeli media: Israel withdraws its embassy staff from Jordan,” *Al Rai*, 8/10/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/dgNV7>



by angry young men coming close to storming the embassy compound for the first time. The Royal Court issued a sharp statement describing the Israeli bombing as “a hideous massacre that cannot be tolerated.”<sup>11</sup> As a result, the summit scheduled to be held the next day in Amman in the presence of US President, Joe Biden, Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, and Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, in addition to the King of Jordan was cancelled.

Subsequently, Jordan led Arab diplomatic efforts in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that succeeded in securing a resolution from the UNGA, following the failure of the Security Council due to the US veto against two Russian and Brazilian draft resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire. The UNGA resolution, which was issued on 27 October, was approved by a majority of 120 countries and opposed by 14, and called for an immediate, permanent and sustainable humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities, at the tenth emergency special session of the United Nations, which discussed “illegal Israeli activity.”<sup>12</sup> However, Israel ignored the resolution and on the same day launched its ground offensive against the Gaza Strip, taking full advantage of seemingly unconditional US support for its policies.

### III: Ramifications of the Israeli Aggression in Gaza for Jordan

The issues that the Jordanian government attaches great importance to in relation to the Israeli aggression against Gaza can be summarized threefold: displacement, regional confrontation, and local public opinion in solidarity with Palestine.

#### 1. Displacement

Jordan pre-empted the possibility of displacement that the US administration and some Western leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron discussed with Egypt arose, and immediately drew a red line under the matter. This was confirmed in statements by the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speeches by King Abdullah, and the efforts that Jordan made to rally the Arab countries towards rejecting it in a unified statement issued before the Israeli ground invasion of Gaza began.<sup>13</sup>

Jordan considers the issue of displacement in Gaza a form of population transfer and a prelude to the final liquidation of the Palestinian question at the expense of neighbouring countries, specifically Egypt and Jordan. If this were to happen to Gaza, it could translate into motivation for existent Zionist proposals calling to transfer Palestinians in the West Bank to Jordan (an implementation of “the alternative homeland”), which a number of Israeli leaders have called for. In his book, *A Place Among*

<sup>11</sup> “Foreign Minister: Suspending the Quadripartite Summit because It Will Not Be Able to Stop the War Now,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18/10/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3QzCCsx>

<sup>12</sup> 120 countries voted in favour of the resolution, while 14 countries opposed it, and 45 others abstained from voting. See: “The United Nations General Assembly adopts an Arab resolution for a humanitarian truce in Gaza,” *Al Jazeera Net*, 10/27/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3sxpFaF>.

<sup>13</sup> Tamer Hindawi, “9 Arab countries reject any attempt to liquidate the Palestinian cause and displace the population of the Gaza Strip,” *Al-Quds*, 26/10/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/dopFW>



*the Nations*, Benjamin Netanyahu called to give the Arab residents of the West Bank the authority to manage their own affairs, with the exception of security, water, and land, while annexing them to Jordan, where they could establish their own state that includes the Palestinians who are already there.<sup>14</sup> Such proposals represent a direct threat to the existence of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the final liquidation of the Palestinian cause. The Jordanian Prime Minister said that “attempts to displace Palestinians from Gaza or the West Bank will be considered by Jordan as a declaration of war.”<sup>15</sup>

These fears were once considered exaggerations, but the deal of the century promoted by the Trump administration made them a reality, as the US recognized the whole of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, where it transferred its embassy, dealt with the Palestinian issue as an economic problem, and considered settlements in the West Bank a minor issue. Consequently, Jordanian concerns about imposing new facts on the ground that could be given a legal status later have soared, especially if Israel has US backing. The US can easily afford to ignore an ally like Jordan if the issue concerns Israel. Jordan is also increasingly alarmed by the rightwards shift in Israeli society and the ascension of extremist forces in the Knesset who actively reject traditional solutions to the Palestinian issue. For example, the Israeli Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, appeared in Paris with a map of Israel that includes much of the Arab world, including Jordan.

## 2. Regional Confrontation

Since “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood” and the subsequent Israeli war on Gaza, there has been increasing talk about the possibility of the war expanding to include other regional parties, especially in light of the daily clashes between Hezbollah and Israel, the involvement of the Houthis and other pro-Iranian militias, the US strengthening its military capabilities in the region, and its threats against those harm its interests in the region.<sup>16</sup>

Jordan is at the heart of any potential regional confrontation, sharing borders with both Syria and Iraq, which host armed militias backed by Iran. The outbreak of a full-scale regional is a real military and security challenge for Jordan, as it is in direct contact with these Iranian-backed armed groups from the north and east, and from the west it has the longest borders with Israel, as well as hosting US military bases on its territory that could represent military targets for these groups. For this reason, according to a Jordanian army spokesman, Jordan requested Washington deploy the Patriot air defence system along its borders, a system that was previously deployed in 2013 in response to the escalation in Syria.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among the Nations*, (Michigan: Bantam Books, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> “Jordanian Prime Minister: Any attempts to displace Palestinians considered a ‘declaration of war,’” Qatar News Agency, 6/11/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/46X1Yr>

<sup>16</sup> Michelle Nichols, “Blinken Tells UN: US does not Want War with Iran but will Defend itself,” *Reuters*, 25/10/23, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/czEH7>

<sup>17</sup> “Jordan asks Washington to deploy the Patriot system,” *Al Hurra*, 10/30/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/wyG28>



### 3. The Jordanian Public's Solidarity with Palestine

The Palestinian issue has always driven the Jordanian public to the street to take part in demonstrations and pressure the authorities to take firmer positions towards Israel, dating back to the peace agreement. The Jordanian authorities are aware of this sensitivity regarding their political positions towards the Palestinian issue and towards Israel.

Security on the Jordanian street ranges between containment at times and repressive at others, based on the number of demonstrators, the extent of tension, the political chanting, and the location of the demonstration (demonstrators are prevented from reaching the border with Israel or anywhere within the vicinity of the US embassy), but what is constant in Jordan's dealings with the demonstrations is political sensitivity. This sensitivity is based on its understanding of two features: the first is that the forces organizing the protest, led by the National Forum for Supporting Resistance and Protecting the Homeland,<sup>18</sup> include factions of the political opposition, such as the Islamic Action Front Party, which has the largest presence, while emphasizing that the participants in the demonstrations are of various orientations. The second is that the demonstrations often get out of control and generate political and security repercussions.

## IV: Jordan's Balancing Act

Jordan will continue to press for an end to the war on the Gaza Strip, seeking the help of Arab allies and Western leaders. If the Israeli aggression continues and the pace of massacres against Palestinians escalates in the Gaza Strip as well as in the West Bank, Jordan may be forced to take stronger steps such as reducing diplomatic relations with Israel. Jordan was the first country to withdraw its ambassador to consult with countries normalized with Israel,<sup>19</sup> but it is unlikely that Jordan will sever its diplomatic relations with Israel. The kingdom may even resort to using these relations to exert more pressure on Israel to break the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and increase humanitarian aid, whether medical or relief, as it did when it delivered medical aid to the Jordanian field hospital in Gaza. This may help contain the growing anger of the Jordanian street. It is expected that Jordan will postpone the signing of an agreement funded by the UAE to exchange electricity for water with Israel, which was prepared to be completed at the United Nations Climate Change Conference scheduled to be held in Dubai at the end of November 2023.<sup>20</sup> The deal reached the final stages of completion last September, when Israeli energy minister, Yisrael Katz, held a final planning meeting with the UAE-based company. Rather than pulling out of this agreement completely, it is more likely that Jordan will suspend it, in order not to rile up the Jordanian public and push them onto the street. Further, rescinding the agreement could remain an option to pressure Israel.

<sup>18</sup> "Announcement of the 'National Forum to Support the Resistance and Protect the Homeland' in Jordan," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 6/3/2022, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/cfnAH>

<sup>19</sup> "In protest against the Gaza war... Jordan summons its ambassador to Israel," *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 11/1/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/eAIK5>

<sup>20</sup> Ari Rabinovitch, "Israeli Minister Meets UAE's Masdar on Jordan Water-for-energy Deal," *Reuters*, 26/9/2023, accessed on 14/11/2023, at: <https://shorturl.at/qzEOZ>





## Conclusion

Jordan relies heavily on its alliance with the US, which complicates its regional and international maneuverability and limits its options to confront the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, especially given the direct involvement of the US in supporting Israel and presenting radical proposals (such as displacement) without consulting its Egyptian and Jordanian allies on the matter. However, as a result, Amman is unlikely to reconsider its strategic relations internationally. Rather, it will continue to follow a policy in which it balances its close alliance with the US, while continuing to reject the liquidation of the Palestinian question, push back against the Israeli war on Gaza, and press for revived efforts towards a two-state solution.