

# NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: JORDAN AND THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

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DECEMBER 8, 2022

The Middle East witnessed remarkable change in August and September 2020 with the Abraham Accords. It began with decisions taken by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain to enter into peace agreements with Israel. Sudan and Morocco followed soon thereafter.<sup>1</sup> Seemingly overnight, a rare sense of optimism washed over the Middle East.

These agreements were certainly not the first of their kind. In 1979, Egypt made peace with Israel. In 1993, the Palestinians entered the Oslo diplomatic process with Israel, initiating more than a decade of attempted peacemaking. In 1994, Jordan made its own peace with Israel.

For the two decades that followed, observers referred to Jordanian-Israeli ties as the “warm peace,” particularly compared to the frosty ties Israel maintained with Egypt and the collapse of Oslo. However, since 2020, if not before then, the Jordanian peace has turned decidedly cold. It is especially frigid now compared to the rapidly growing ties between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco. Even relations between Israel and Egypt have improved. With rhetoric that increasingly echoes the sentiments of rejectionist Arab nationalists or even Islamists, Jordan’s current policies appear to run counter to the current trendlines of the Middle East.

After the recent electoral victory of Israeli politician Benjamin Netanyahu, along with other right-wing Israeli politicians, Jordan issued an unprovoked and blistering statement warning Israel not to alter the status quo on the Temple Mount, invoking its role as custodian of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The statement signaled the likely renewal of acrimonious ties between the king and Israel’s longest-serving prime minister.<sup>2</sup>

All of this should come as unwelcome news to the United States and to America’s Middle East allies. In anticipation of intensifying great power competition with China, and perhaps to a lesser extent Russia, it is crucial for Washington to project unity among allies in the Middle East. No less important for the Middle East is the prospect of stability, prosperity, and positive change, which will require Jordan as a willing partner. This is especially the case amidst the continued havoc that the Islamic Republic of Iran is exporting across the region.

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1. David Daoud and Varsha Koduvayur, “Welcome to a Brand-New Middle East,” *Foreign Policy*, September 30, 2020. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/30/israel-uae-bahrain-palestinians-peace>)

2. “Jordan said to warn incoming government against touching Temple Mount status quo,” *The Times of Israel* (Israel), November 7, 2022. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-said-to-warn-incoming-government-against-touching-temple-mount-status-quo/>)

The following memo assesses Jordan's recent and escalating antagonism toward Israel. It also explores the regional friction created by Jordan's abstention from the Abraham Accords alliance structures. The memo concludes with recommendations to tackle this challenge, which could hinder U.S. national security interests if not addressed.

## REGIONAL CHANGES

Several events led to the profound regional change in the last decade. The first was the Arab Spring, which began in 2011. While the first waves of unrest initially challenged the corrupt and ossified authoritarian regimes that dominated the region, Israel and several Arab governments stood opposed to the emergence of Muslim Brotherhood movements that sought to hijack the protests. Concerns about regional stability deepened in 2013, with the announcement of the interim Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA). The Israelis, under the leadership of then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, were stridently opposed to this U.S.-led effort. In many ways, Israel's active public diplomacy gave voice to the concerns of the rest of the region, which is traditionally less vocal. Israel further inspired some of the surrounding states when it began to wage the "war between wars," an asymmetric campaign targeting Iranian military assets across the region.<sup>3</sup>

Israel also emerged in recent years as a regional (if not a global) power in the realms of technology, intelligence collection, missile defense, desalination, agriculture, life sciences, cyber, and more.<sup>4</sup> The Arab world increasingly seeks to benefit from Israel's capabilities. Israel's natural gas discoveries, which could serve to provide additional funds for these advancements, only make a stronger case for integration.

Concurrently, Arab governments have grown less zealous about the Palestinian cause. This does not mean that the Arab world has given up on the idea of Palestinian state. But a growing number of Arab states are exasperated with the ineffectual Palestinian leadership that has squandered Arab financial and political support. Slowly and steadily, Arab countries have deprioritized the Palestinian cause and are now increasingly pursuing their own national interests. With leading Arab states stressing "stability and prosperity,"<sup>5</sup> there are clear opportunities for other normalization agreements to follow. Jordan appears to be ambivalent about this.

## THE BENEFITS OF PEACE

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was opposed to the creation of the Jewish state in 1948. Jordan joined the Arab war against Israel and conquered the West Bank and East Jerusalem during that clash. Conflict between the two countries simmered for the next two decades before erupting again in 1967, when Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem. What followed were decades of public enmity but secret diplomacy. In 1963, King Hussein established a direct channel with a senior Israeli diplomat in London.<sup>6</sup> Seven years later, Israel mobilized to thwart Syrian aggression against the Hashemite Kingdom during the Black September crisis.<sup>7</sup> In 1973, King Hussein even warned Israel of an impending Arab attack on the eve of the Yom Kippur War.<sup>8</sup> Even though the two countries harbored severe political disagreements, they came to see one another as assets. In 1987, they nearly reached a

3. Yaakov Lappin, "The War Between Wars: Israel vs Iran in Syria," *Fathom Journal*, October 2018. (<https://fathomjournal.org/the-war-between-wars-israel-vs-iran-in-syria/>)

4. Hideki Uno and Benjamin Glanz, "Sustaining Israel's Innovation Economy," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 23, 2022. (<https://www.csis.org/blogs/perspectives-innovation/sustaining-israels-innovation-economy>)

5. Meeting with senior Arab official, September 15, 2021.

6. Bruce Riedel, *Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), page 50.

7. Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pages 138–139.

8. Bruce Riedel, *Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), page 77.

peace agreement, but the First Intifada scuttled that opportunity.<sup>9</sup> When the Palestinians entered into the Oslo Accords in 1993, that was the last barrier to agreement for Hussein. He made peace with Israel in 1994.

The personal relationship between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein was key to the initial warm ties.<sup>10</sup> By 1997, however, there were signs of strain. One reason was the attempted assassination of Hamas official Khaled Meshaal by the Israeli Mossad in Amman. The attempt on Meshaal's life sparked a diplomatic crisis that forced Israel to provide the antidote (and the release of Hamas founding leader Ahmed Yassin from Israeli prison) in exchange for Jordan's release of the captured Israeli spies.<sup>11</sup> Tensions also spiked that year when a Jordanian soldier opened fire on a group of Israeli students visiting the "Island of Peace" — land leased to Israel as part of the 1994 arrangement. In a dramatic moment, King Hussein visited Israel and knelt before the victims' families.<sup>12</sup>

After the death of King Hussein and the ascension of his son, Abdullah, in February 1999, ties began to deteriorate more significantly. The new king appeared to harbor more overt distrust for Israel. This is abundantly clear in Abdullah's 2011 autobiography, in which the monarch asserts that "Israeli policies are mainly to blame for [the current] gloomy reality."<sup>13</sup> Tensions soared with the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000. This campaign of terrorism, carried out by scores of Palestinian terrorist groups, was met with zero tolerance by the Israeli government. Protesting the Israeli response, Jordan recalled its ambassador. Diplomatic ties were not restored until 2005, after the violence subsided.<sup>14</sup>

Fortunately, what followed was nearly a decade of relatively stable relations. The commitment to an enduring peace has benefitted both Israel and the Hashemite regime. Military, intelligence, economic, and other cooperation have undeniably helped both sides. For Israel, the predictability and relative stability along its longest border certainly enables the military pivot toward more pressing concerns.

For Jordan, the economic perks are particularly clear. As an inducement to enter the peace agreement, President Bill Clinton promised to forgive \$700 million of Jordan's debt<sup>15</sup> (though the sum was later reduced as it passed through Congress).<sup>16</sup> In November 1997, the U.S. established a Qualifying Industrial Zone (QIZ) in Jordan. Goods manufactured in the QIZ could be exported to the United States duty free, provided they had Israeli inputs. The

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9. London Agreement, London, April 7, 1987. (<https://israeled.org/resources/documents/london-document-agreement-between-israel-and-jordan-on-an-international-peace-conference/>)

10. Bruce Riedel, "25 years on, remembering the path to peace for Jordan and Israel," *The Brookings Institution*, October 23, 2019. (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/10/23/25-years-on-remembering-the-path-to-peace-for-jordan-and-israel/>)

11. Michael Omer-Man, "This Week in History: The failed assassination of Mashaal," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), September 29, 2011. (<https://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/This-Week-in-History-The-failed-assassination-of-Mashaal>)

12. Gwen Ackerman, "Jordan's king touches Israelis by joining their mourning," *Associated Press*, March 16, 1997. (<https://apnews.com/article/48b26c7e4552c7f935a18a1ec8366885>)

13. King Abdullah II of Jordan, *Our Last Best Chance: A Story of War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), page 325.

14. "Amman envoy returns to Israel," *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), February 20, 2005. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/2/20/amman-envoy-returns-to-israel>)

15. Thomas W. Lippman, "Clinton promises to seek forgiveness of Jordan's debt," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 1994. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/06/23/clinton-promises-to-seek-forgiveness-of-jordans-debt/5bea4acb-33db-4826-84bb-f00a153e7d5b>)

16. "Congress Advances Jordan Debt Relief," *Associated Press*, July 30, 1994. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/30/world/congress-advances-jordan-debt-relief.html>)

agreement helped create 60,000 jobs and facilitated substantial growth in trade.<sup>17</sup> Jordanian exports to the United States are now more than \$1 billion.<sup>18</sup>

In 2001, Washington signed a free trade agreement with Jordan, America's first with an Arab country, which came into effect in 2010. Trade between the U.S. and Jordan increased by more than 30 percent between 2009 and 2013 alone.<sup>19</sup> Today, the United States is Jordan's largest supplier of aid.<sup>20</sup> While not all of this resulted directly from the 1994 agreement, Washington unquestionably intended to provide perks for maintaining peace with Israel.

Israel also contributed to Jordan's economic growth following the 1994 agreement. Tourism in Jordan expanded significantly following the peace agreement. This includes a marked uptick in visitors from the United States and Israel.<sup>21</sup> Currently, Israel and Jordan are negotiating the construction of the joint Jordan Gateway Industrial Park to create more jobs and to strengthen both economies.<sup>22</sup>

Israel has likewise contributed significantly to Jordan's well-being through the provision of water and energy. The 1994 accords stipulated that Israel sell Jordan a specified amount of water annually. Israel, a world leader in desalination technology, has held up its end of the bargain and last year even agreed to double its contribution.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, in 2014, after discovering gas off its Mediterranean coast, Israel agreed to export \$500 million worth of gas to Jordan.<sup>24</sup> Texas-based Noble Energy and Jordan's National Electric Company signed a 15-year, \$10 billion gas deal in 2016. The deal provides for 40 percent of Jordan's electricity needs.<sup>25</sup> Noble sent its first shipment of gas to Jordan in 2020.<sup>26</sup> Israel and Jordan also agreed to a water-for-energy deal in November 2021, whereby Israel will provide Jordan with 200 million cubic meters of water in exchange for solar energy.<sup>27</sup> The two countries reaffirmed the agreement at the United Nations COP27 climate conference in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh in

17. Joshua Krasna, "The Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty at 25: A Slightly Tarnished, but Still Important, Silver Anniversary," *The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security*, June 20, 2019. (<https://jiss.org.il/en/krasna-the-jordan-israel-peace-treaty-at-25>)

18. Jawad Anani and Shimon Shamir, "Jordan-Israel Peace at Twenty-Five: Past, Present, and Future," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, October 11, 2019. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/jordan-israel-peace-twenty-five-past-present-and-future>)

19. David Schenker, "Twenty Years of Israeli-Jordanian Peace: A Brief Assessment," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, October 23, 2014. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twenty-years-israeli-jordanian-peace-brief-assessment>)

20. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, "U.S. Relations with Jordan: Bilateral Fact Sheet," April 27, 2022. (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-jordan>)

21. Michele Chabin, "Peace turns Jordan into a hotspot for travelers," *The Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1995. (<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1995-12-10-9512100158-story.html>)

22. @Yairlapid, *Twitter*, July 31, 2022. (<https://twitter.com/yairlapid/status/1553699604083908609>)

23. Dan Williams, "Israel doubles water supply to Jordan; source says PM met king," *Reuters*, July 8, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-sell-jordan-additional-water-this-year-minister-says-2021-07-08>)

24. Marissa Newman, "Israel signs \$15 billion gas deal with Jordan," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), September 3, 2014. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-signs-15-billion-gas-deal-with-jordan>)

25. Raed Omari, "Jordan signs deal to buy oil from Israel," *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), September 26, 2016. (<https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-signs-deal-buy-gas-israel>)

26. Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Jordan gets first natural gas supplies from Israel," *Reuters*, January 1, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/jordan-israel-gas-idUSL8N2960Q9>)

27. "Israel, Jordan to partner in water-for-energy deal," *Reuters*, November 22, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/israel-jordan-partner-water-for-energy-deal-israeli-ministry-says-2021-11-22>)

November 2022.<sup>28</sup> At the conference, Jordan and Israel also signed an agreement to mitigate pollution of the Jordan River, which borders both countries.<sup>29</sup>

Israel and the United States have also cooperated closely with the Jordanians on a wide range of security-related issues.<sup>30</sup> Not all of this activity has been made public. But the training, intelligence-sharing, and other military activity has been hailed by all three militaries. In 2015, Jordanian pilots flew alongside their Israeli counterparts in a Red Flag exercise (advanced aerial combat training hosted by the United States Air Force). This was the first time the parties publicly acknowledged joint air force training.<sup>31</sup> Last year, Jordan also participated in an Israeli-hosted Blue Flag exercise, air force training designed to simulate realistic combat scenarios.<sup>32</sup>

## INCREASINGLY OPEN HOSTILITY

Despite all of this, Jordan remains relatively poor and somewhat unstable. Of course, the country's perennially tenuous economic and political challenges would have undeniably been far worse without the assistance made possible by the 1994 agreement. But this offers little consolation.

Driven by a combination of domestic political considerations, unrealistic expectations, and both legitimate and illegitimate grievances, Amman has pulled away from Israel in recent years. The official rhetoric about Israel has grown increasingly negative, if not vitriolic. The same can be observed in Jordan's government-censored media. And despite the ongoing cooperation on a range of challenges, diplomatic ties are in a deep freeze. Israeli officials are keenly aware of this dynamic. They have shared their frustration in closed-door meetings.<sup>33</sup>

In recent years, senior Israeli officials quietly attributed tensions to a personality conflict between King Abdullah II and Benjamin Netanyahu.<sup>34</sup> Trump administration policies that Israel welcomed did not sit well with Jordan, either. Specifically, Jordanian officials warned that moving the American embassy to Jerusalem was a "red line" that

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28. Sue Surkes, "Israel, Jordan, UAE sign new MOU on deal to swap solar energy for desalinated water," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), November 8, 2022. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-jordan-uae-sign-new-mou-on-deal-to-swap-solar-energy-for-desalinated-water>)

29. Isabel Debre, "Israel and Jordan Agree to Team Up to Save Jordan River," *Associated Press*, November 17, 2022. (<https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-business-israel-jordan-polution-e50adf6d253cdd9ea73775052705c5bf>)

30. David Schenker, "Twenty Years of Israeli-Jordanian Peace: A Brief Assessment," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, October 23, 2014. (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twenty-years-israeli-jordanian-peace-brief-assessment>); "Israel gives Jordan helicopters for border security - U.S. source," *Reuters*, July 23, 2015. (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-3172274/Israel-gives-Jordan-helicopters-border-security--U-S-source.html>); Elise Labott and Jeremy Diamond, "Israel bolsters ties to Jordan as ISIS looms," *CNN*, February 6, 2015. (<https://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/06/politics/israel-jordan-relationship-strengthened-isis/index.html>); Amos Harel, "Israel and Jordan Grow Closer as Iranian Foothold in Southern Syria Grows Stronger," *Haaretz* (Israel), June 21, 2017. (<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2017-06-21/ty-article/.premium/israel-and-jordan-grow-closer-amid-iranian-foothold-in-syria/0000017f-efa9-da6f-a77f-ffaf85070000>)

31. "Jordanian combat pilots flew with Israel counterparts in recent US exercise," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), November 3, 2015. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordanian-combat-pilots-trained-with-israel-counterparts-in-us-this-summer>)

32. Judah Ari Gross, "German photographer spills the beans: Jordan flew in IDF aerial drill," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), October 29, 2021. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/german-photographer-spills-the-beans-jordan-flew-in-idf-aerial-drill>)

33. Meetings with Israeli officials, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, August 25, 2022.

34. Ibid.

would have “catastrophic” impact.<sup>35</sup> Ties were strained further when Netanyahu prepared to annex portions of the West Bank in 2020, with Abdullah warning of a “massive conflict” as a result.<sup>36</sup>

When Netanyahu left office in 2021, officials in Jerusalem expected ties to improve. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett claimed that Netanyahu “destroyed” Israel’s relationship with Jordan and declared that his government was “fixing the relationship.”<sup>37</sup> Alternate Prime Minister Yair Lapid similarly acknowledged Jordan’s role as “an important strategic ally for Israel” and pledged to “work with” Abdullah to “strengthen the relationship between our two countries.”<sup>38</sup> According to Israeli officials, relations improved during the Bennett/Lapid government’s time in office.<sup>39</sup> However, Jordanian rhetoric toward Israel did not markedly improve. New tensions are now expected with the return of Netanyahu, given the king’s unabashed distaste for the Israeli leader. Ties could be further strained with reports that Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal has been spending more time in Jordan with the approval of the Hashemite Kingdom.<sup>40</sup>

## THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

In an oversimplification of the current dynamics, Jordanian officials invariably blame Israel’s ongoing military presence in the disputed West Bank for the recent tensions. Officials in Amman have grown sharply critical of policies they associate with the “Israeli occupation.” Of course, the status quo has not changed dramatically since Jordan entered into its agreement with Israel in 1994. Moreover, if it were simple to fix the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it would have been solved long ago. Nevertheless, Jordan blames the failure of the Palestinians to achieve statehood on Israeli policy. The Israelis dispute this, insisting that a combination of Palestinian corruption, poor governance, irredentism, disunity, and extremism have made this file even more challenging to address.

The Palestinian issue is undeniably the driving force behind Jordan’s rhetoric. An estimated 50 percent of Jordan’s population of 10 million is Palestinian, owing to migration from the 1948–1949 Israeli War of Independence (or the Palestinian “Nakba,” depending upon one’s view of history). Jordanian politicians and diplomats will cite this figure behind closed doors, but the government has in the past attempted to adjust this figure downward. The Palestinian Authority-run Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated in 2015 that 2.2 million Palestinians were living in Jordan.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the precise number, the Palestinians make up a substantial portion of the population in Jordan.

While Jordanian officials may not say so explicitly, the animosity harbored by Jordan’s Palestinian population toward Israel has a significant influence on the kingdom’s foreign policies. Despite its reliance upon Israel for security, intelligence, and a range of products and services, and despite the trilateral relationship with Israel and

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35. “Relocating US embassy to Jerusalem a red line — Jordan,” *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), January 5, 2017. (<https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/relocating-us-embassy-jerusalem-red-line-%E2%80%94-jordan>)

36. “Jordan warns Israel of ‘massive conflict’ over annexation,” *Al Jazeera* (Qatar), May 16, 2020. (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/16/jordan-warns-israel-of-massive-conflict-over-annexation>)

37. Lahav Harkov, “Bennett: Ties with Jordan essential for Israel’s security,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), July 12, 2021. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/bennett-ties-with-jordan-essential-for-israels-security-673636>)

38. Tovah Lazaroff, “Jordan pulls plug on Red-Dead water project with Israel – report,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), June 19, 2021. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/jordan-pulls-plug-on-red-dead-water-project-with-israel-report-671372>)

39. Meeting with Israeli officials, Washington, DC, December 6, 2022.

40. “Islamist MP calls on government to reconcile with Hamas,” *Jordan News* (Jordan), August 11, 2022. (<https://www.jordannews.jo/Section-109/News/Islamist-MP-calls-on-gov-t-to-reconcile-with-Hamas-20361>)

41. Roi Kais, “Is Jordan hiding how many Palestinians are in the country,” *Ynet News* (Israel), December 1, 2016. (<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4751617,00.html>)

the United States that is a core pillar of Jordan's relationship with Washington, Amman simply cannot embrace Israel openly. This has become abundantly clear in recent years.

In a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in 2016, King Abdullah placed the blame for the lack of diplomatic progress between Israel and the Palestinians entirely on Israel. "No injustice has spread more bitter fruit than the denial of a Palestinian state," he said. "Peace is a conscious decision. Israel has to embrace peace or eventually be engulfed in a sea of hatred in a region of turmoil."<sup>42</sup>

In 2017, a Jordanian stabbed an Israeli security guard at the residential complex at the Israeli embassy compound in Amman.<sup>43</sup> The guard — Ziv Moyal — shot his attacker in self-defense. The Jordanian landlord was also shot and eventually died from his wounds. A standoff ensued after the shooting.<sup>44</sup> Invoking diplomatic immunity, Israel would not permit Jordanian authorities to question Moyal. Jordan, however, would not allow Moyal to leave the country without being investigated. The impasse ended after diplomatic interventions by U.S. officials. The warm public reception that Prime Minister Netanyahu gave Moyal did not help improve matters.<sup>45</sup>

Notably, that incident occurred amidst the tensions that flared at the Temple Mount compound, where Israel had installed metal detectors after Israeli-Arab gunmen killed two Israeli policemen. The move unleashed a wave of public outrage, including a direct intervention by King Abdullah, invoking his role as custodian of the religious authorities on the Temple Mount, pursuant to the 1994 peace agreement. After Moyal returned to Israel, Israel removed the metal detectors.<sup>46</sup> After that, Israel reopened its embassy in Amman and agreed to pay reparations.<sup>47</sup>

The frictions between Jordan and Israel were far from settled after this. In fact, disagreements over the Temple Mount were just heating up. Jordan, citing its role of custodian over the Temple Mount, continues to assert itself. Israel, which has sovereignty over the holy site that holds great significance for Jews and Muslims alike, continues to coordinate with Jordan. But it refuses to cede full control. This should come as no surprise. Israel has legitimate security concerns. And the Israelis want to convey that they maintain full control over their capital. Jordan, which lost Jerusalem to Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, understands this dynamic full well. Nevertheless, Israel's security presence, the role and numbers of Jordanian personnel assigned to monitor the compound, and other related issues continue to irk officials in Amman, who openly express their frustrations.

But it is the fate of the Palestinian national project that remains the focus of Jordanian officials. In 2020, amidst reports that Israel might annex parts of the disputed West Bank, the king effectively warned that he was considering nullifying the 1994 peace agreement. "I don't want to make threats and create an atmosphere of loggerheads, but

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42. King Abdullah II of Jordan, *Speech before Plenary Session of the 71<sup>st</sup> United Nations General Assembly*, September 20, 2016. (<https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/plenary-session-71st-united-nations-general-assembly>)

43. Peter Beaumont, "Two killed in shooting at Israeli embassy in Jordan," *The Guardian* (UK), July 24, 2017. (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/at-least-one-person-killed-in-shooting-near-israel-embassy-in-jordan>)

44. "Israel Embassy shooting in Jordan complicates holy site crisis," *Associated Press*, July 24, 2017. (<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1134161/middle-east>)

45. "Jordan FM: Hero's welcome in Israel for guard who killed two a 'disgrace,'" *Agence France-Presse* (France), July 27, 2017. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-fm-heros-welcome-in-israel-for-guard-who-killed-two-a-disgrace>)

46. "Israel begins removal of metal detectors from Temple Mount," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), July 25, 2017. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-removes-metal-detectors-from-temple-mount>)

47. Alexander Fulbright, "Netanyahu thanks US for 'behind-the-scenes' work to end Jordan embassy impasse," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), January 20, 2018. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-thanks-us-for-behind-the-scenes-work-to-end-jordan-embassy-impasse>)

we are considering all options,” he stated.<sup>48</sup> What is notable here is that the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were equally opposed to such an Israeli move. However, the UAE and Bahrain leveraged Israel’s desire to deepen ties with the Arab world to thwart the move. Indeed, the UAE secured Israeli guarantees to prevent annexation by entering into the Abraham Accords.

During the 2021 war between Israel and the Iran-backed terrorist group Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Jordan effectively took Hamas’ side in the global battle for public opinion. Just before the eruption of conflict, a government statement accused “Israeli police and special forces” of being “barbaric.” Amidst coordinated unrest on the Temple Mount, including rock-throwing and other forms of violence, Jordan “rejected and condemned” the responding Israeli security forces for what it described as “violations against the mosque to attacks on worshippers.”<sup>49</sup> When war broke out several days later, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi slammed Israel at the Arab League, saying the Jewish state was “playing with fire.” At the Arab League’s emergency meeting, Safadi said, “The Israeli Occupation authorities will not enjoy security if the Palestinians do not enjoy it.”<sup>50</sup>

When tensions flared between Palestinians and Israelis during Ramadan in 2022, including actions taken by Israel to neutralize extremist group activity, Safadi again claimed that Israel was trying to change the status quo in Jerusalem and that this amounted to “playing with fire.”<sup>51</sup>

During the king’s speech before the United Nations General Assembly on September 20, 2022, King Abdullah made the disputable claim that, “Christianity in the Holy City is under fire. The rights of churches in Jerusalem are threatened.”<sup>52</sup> The statement drew contestations and condemnations from a range of Christian groups.<sup>53</sup>

More recently, the Jordanian government has excoriated Israel for actions in lawless pockets of the West Bank. Secretary-General of the Royal Committee for Jerusalem Affairs Abdullah Kanaan condemned Israel in harsh terms for its ongoing battle against extremists. *The Jordan Times*, a government-censored outlet, cited a litany of purported Israeli crimes: “killing, imprisonment, confiscating lands, expelling Palestinians from their lands, raiding Palestinians’ Islamic and Christian holy sites, and imposing restrictions on the freedoms of worship and culture.”<sup>54</sup>

Jordan’s concerns may be sincere. However, such rhetoric has failed to solve any of the region’s problems. If anything, it may be exacerbating them.

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48. Lorne Cook, “Jordan warns Israel of ‘massive conflict’ over annexation,” *Associated Press*, May 15, 2020. (<https://apnews.com/article/benjamin-netanyahu-jordan-donald-trump-israel-international-news-0796151abbe61d12099f4b0380830b6d>)

49. Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Jordan warns Israel against ‘barbaric’ attacks on mosque,” *Reuters*, May 9, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/jordan-warns-israel-against-barbaric-attacks-mosque-statement-2021-05-09>)

50. “Israeli Occupation is playing with fire: Safadi,” *Roya News* (Jordan), May 11, 2021. (<https://en.royanews.tv/news/27841/27841>)

51. “FM: Any Israeli attempt to alter status quo in Jerusalem akin to ‘playing with fire,’” *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), May 11, 2022. (<https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/fm-any-israeli-attempt-alter-status-quo-jerusalem-akin-playing-fire>)

52. King Abdullah II of Jordan, *Speech before Plenary Session of the 77<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly*, September 20, 2022. (<https://kingabdullah.jo/en/speeches/77th-plenary-session-un-general-assembly>)

53. Kassy Dillon, “Christian Zionists Call Out Jordanian King for Suggesting Israel Threatens Christianity,” *Israel Today* (Israel), September 22, 2022, (<https://www.israeltoday.co.il/read/christian-zionists-call-out-jordanian-king-for-suggesting-israel-is-threatening-christianity>)

54. “Kanaan deploras Israeli attacks in occupied Palestinian territories,” *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), October 2, 2022. (<https://jordantimes.com/news/local/kanaan-deploras-israeli-attacks-occupied-palestinian-territories>)



## DIPLOMATIC REJECTIONISM

Jordan has made no attempt to hide its rejection of the new regional order marked by Israeli peace agreements with surrounding Arab states. Shockingly, despite its peace agreement with Israel and its warm relations with the UAE and Bahrain, Jordan refused to send diplomatic representatives to the White House ceremony marking the Abraham Accords.

After the deal was announced, Safadi stated: “If Israel considers the agreement as a means to end the occupation and meet the Palestinians’ rights to freedom and the creation of a viable independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the pre-1967 borders, the region will move ahead towards realizing peace, or else Israel will deepen the conflict that will jeopardize the entire region’s security.”<sup>55</sup>

After the 2021 war between Israel and Hamas, relations between Jordan and Israel were sufficiently tense that a senior Emirati official told a Washington audience that the UAE was actively urging a “reconnection” between the two countries. The official underscored the need for a “channel to influence Israel positively.”<sup>56</sup>

In March 2022, Amman sent a jarring message: it declined to participate in the Negev Summit, a diplomatic conference held in Israel with its peace partners. The UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Egypt all attended, along with the United States. The goal was to formalize collaboration across a range of fields. Efforts to that end are ongoing.

Under increased scrutiny for eschewing regional peace efforts, Jordanian officials have provided two different reasons for declining to join the Negev Summit. The first was a scheduling conflict. Several articles attribute Jordan’s absence to Safadi’s schedule. *The Jerusalem Post* claimed that Safadi was in a “pre-scheduled meeting in Doha” and that he was “more likely to attend future meetings.”<sup>57</sup> Later, it was reported that Safadi had instead accompanied the king to a meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.<sup>58</sup>

The second explanation for Jordan’s failure to participate in the Negev Summit was its insistence that the Palestinians be included. Then Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was apparently hesitant to agree for fear that the Palestinian issue would upstage the broader, regional priorities.<sup>59</sup> The UAE reportedly had similar concerns.

Domestic conditions may have also contributed to Jordan’s decision. Days before the Negev Summit convened, Jordanian officials arrested dozens of political activists commemorating the anniversary of the Arab Spring.<sup>60</sup> Other sources suggest that the government feared political instability, particularly from Islamists and the dominant

55. “Israel has to choose between peace and conflict — FM,” *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), August 14, 2020. (<http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/israel-has-choose-between-peace-and-conflict-%e2%80%94-fm>)

56. Conversation with UAE official, July 13, 2021.

57. Lahav Harkov, “A ‘mini-NATO’ for the Middle East won’t be stopped by terror – analysis,” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), March 28, 2022. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-702566>)

58. Lucy Kurtzer-Ellenbogen and Ambassador Hesham Youssef, “The Negev Summit Furthers Arab-Israeli Normalization,” *United States Institute of Peace*, March 31, 2022. (<https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/negev-summit-furthers-arab-israeli-normalization>)

59. “Instead of sending his foreign minister to the Negev Summit, Jordan’s King Abdullah visits Palestinian leader in Ramallah,” *All Arab News*, March 28, 2022. (<https://allarab.news/instead-of-sending-his-foreign-minister-to-the-negev-summit-jordans-king-abdullah-visits-palestinian-leader-in-ramallah>)

60. “Jordan arrests activists trying to commemorate,” *Teller Report*, March 24, 2022. ([https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2022-03-24-jordan-arrests-activists-trying-to-commemorate-march-24.rJeU\\_FM5zc.html](https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2022-03-24-jordan-arrests-activists-trying-to-commemorate-march-24.rJeU_FM5zc.html))

Palestinian population but also among East Bankers (Jordan's traditional tribal power brokers not of Palestinian origin) if Jordan participated.<sup>61</sup>

## NOT ONLY ISRAEL

The Jordanian government is not only potentially imperiling its valuable relationship with Israel. It has also, at times, snubbed the pragmatic Arab states that have either entered into alliances with Israel (the UAE) or are taking steps to mitigate hostilities with the Jewish state with an eye toward regional stability (the Saudis).

While Jordan has not come out and directly challenged the UAE for its decision to normalize with Israel, the absence of closer cooperation between the three countries reveals a fault line. Until now, the UAE and Israel have exhibited patience toward Jordan. That patience appears to have paid off. In November, the three countries announced plans to move ahead with a deal involving water and solar energy.<sup>62</sup>

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Jordan have been more obvious at times. Friction emerged in 2021 amidst a purported coup plot involving the king's half-brother Hamza that was allegedly disrupted by Jordanian authorities. One figure arrested was Bassem Awadallah, a former Jordanian official with ties to senior Saudi leadership, feeding unsubstantiated suspicions that Saudi Arabia was behind the plot.<sup>63</sup> Saudi officials denied their involvement. But ties were strained enough to spur a Saudi delegation to travel to Amman to "refute in person" whatever charges were being leveled.<sup>64</sup>

Based on background conversations with informed figures in Jordan this summer, the Royal Court may still be adjusting to a new generation of Arab leaders.<sup>65</sup> Figures like Mohammed Bin Zayed (MBZ) of the UAE and Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) of Saudi Arabia are peers of King Abdullah. Yet, because their countries enjoy greater wealth and stability, they have leapfrogged him to emerge as the new leaders of the region. Jordan certainly does not appear to resent their wealth or success. Still, a complicated triangle has formed. While MBZ enjoys warm ties with Abdullah, the king's relationship with MBS is decidedly cooler. MBZ has reportedly worked to help bridge the differences between the Jordanian and Saudi rulers.

## JORDAN'S ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

If Jordan is indeed ambivalent about the wealthier Gulf states and their ties to Israel, this is the wrong time to articulate that. Even with their assistance, Jordan's economy has not performed well. In 2019, Jordan's GDP growth rate hovered at roughly 2 percent for the fourth year in a row. This is a marginal decrease from 2010–2015, when Jordan's GDP grew by an average of 2.6 percent, and significantly lower than 2000–2009, when the average growth

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61. Herb Keinon, "Negev Summit reflects vastly changing Middle East landscape – analysis," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), March 27, 2022. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-702446>)

62. Danny Zaken, "Israel, Jordan, UAE press ahead on deal for water, solar energy," *Al-Monitor*, November 8, 2022. (<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/israel-jordan-uae-press-ahead-deal-water-solar-energy>)

63. Jomana Karadshah, "Jordan's royal family drama sends shudders around the region. Here's what we know," *CNN*, April 6, 2021. (<https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/05/middleeast/jordan-arrests-royal-family-explainer-intl/index.html>)

64. Anuj Chopra, "Arrest of adviser close to Saudi crown prince in Jordan royal feud stirs unrest," *Agence France-Presse* (France), April 13, 2021. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/arrest-of-adviser-close-to-saudi-crown-prince-in-jordan-royal-feud-stirs-unrest>)

65. Meetings with former Jordanian officials, Amman, August 22–24, 2022.

rate was 6.4 percent.<sup>66</sup> In 2019, Jordan's public debt reached 99 percent of GDP<sup>67</sup> and then ballooned to 113 percent in 2021.<sup>68</sup>

Some of this is due to the impact of a series of regional crises. Turmoil in Iraq and Syria has caused critical trade routes to close. The Arab Spring severely disrupted the country's energy supply.<sup>69</sup> Jordan has also suffered from a massive influx of refugees, as many as 1.3 million, seeking to escape the civil war in Syria.<sup>70</sup> Covid-19 further battered Jordan, causing the economy to contract by 1.6 percent in 2020.<sup>71</sup> The economy has bounced back, but economic growth is still expected to hover at a meager 2 percent.<sup>72</sup> And despite this growth, unemployment in Jordan rose from 18.6 percent in 2018 to 23.3 percent last year.<sup>73</sup>

In September 2022, Jordan and the U.S. signed a seven-year memorandum of understanding, allocating \$1.45 billion annually to Jordan beginning in 2023.<sup>74</sup> The aid may help Jordan tackle some of the above challenges, but Jordanian officials admit that it will likely be insufficient to meet the country's economic and military needs.

The Saudis and Emiratis serve as Jordan's most important Arab financial patrons. In 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes Saudi Arabia and the UAE, established a \$5 billion development program for Jordan.<sup>75</sup> Other Saudi investments in 2015 included \$50 million for the construction of a fiber optic internet network and \$30 million to support industrial cities in Tafilah, Madaba, Jerash, and Al-Salt.<sup>76</sup>

In 2018, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait pledged an additional \$2.5 billion to help revive Jordan's economy.<sup>77</sup> Fulfillment is another story, of course. In 2019, the UAE provided \$500.2 million in aid to Jordan, primarily through the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development.<sup>78</sup> The UAE also deposited \$333 million in the Jordanian Central Bank to address Jordan's budget deficit. That was converted into a soft loan in 2022.<sup>79</sup>

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66. The World Bank, "Jordan Economic Monitor: Weathering the Storm," June 2020. (<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/895901594653936142/pdf/Jordan-Economic-Monitor-Spring-2020-Weathering-the-Storm.pdf>)

67. Ibid.

68. The World Bank, "Jordan," May 26, 2022. (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>)

69. Jordan Social Security Investment Fund, The Economic Policy Council, "Jordan Economic Growth Plan 2018–2022," accessed November 17, 2022. (<https://www.ssif.gov.jo/UploadFiles/JEGProgramEnglish.pdf>)

70. King Abdullah II of Jordan, *Address before the 77<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly*, September 20, 2022. (<https://kingabdullah.jo/en/news/king-delivers-jordan%E2%80%99s-address-77th-unga-session>)

71. "Economic Reform Activity," USAID, Jordan, June 15, 2022. (<https://www.usaid.gov/jordan/fact-sheets/jordan/economic-reform-activity>)

72. "World Bank projects Jordanian economy to grow by 2.1% in 2022," *Reuters*, July 18, 2022. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/world-bank-says-jordan-economy-projected-grow-by-21-2022-2022-07-18>)

73. "Jordan Economic Outlook," *Focus Economics*, June 7, 2022. (<https://www.focus-economics.com/countries/jordan>); "Jordan," *The World Bank*, May 26, 2022. (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>)

74. U.S. Embassy in Jordan, Press Release, "Joint Statement on the Signing of the Bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership between the United States and Jordan," September 16, 2022. (<https://jo.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-on-the-signing-of-the-bilateral-memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-united-states-jordan>)

75. Oliver Cornock, "Time to Build," *Venture Magazine*, December 21, 2015. (<http://venturemagazine.me/2015/12/time-to-build>)

76. "Saudi to fund \$50m fibre optic project in Jordan," *Trade Arabia* (Bahrain), December 17, 2015. ([http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IT\\_297018.html](http://www.tradearabia.com/news/IT_297018.html))

77. "Saudi Arabia Sends \$50 MN in Fourth Aid Installment to Jordan," *Asharq Al-Awsat* (UK), April 22, 2022. (<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3605621/saudi-arabia-sends-50-mn-fourth-aid-installment-jordan>)

78. "Foreign Aid," *Embassy of the United Arab Emirates: Washington, DC*, accessed November 17, 2022. (<https://www.uae-embassy.org/discover-uae/foreign-policy/foreign-aid>)

79. "Agreement reached to convert \$333m UAE deposit into soft loan — source," *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), June 15, 2022. (<https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/agreement-reached-convert-333m-uae-deposit-soft-loan-%E2%80%94-source>)

In 2020, the UAE sent several shipments of medical aid to help Jordan combat the pandemic.<sup>80</sup> In 2022, Jordan, the UAE, and Egypt established the Industrial Partnership for Sustainable Economic Development — a \$10 billion investment fund backed by the Abu Dhabi holding firm ADQ.<sup>81</sup> The three countries signed an agricultural agreement under which the UAE will invest in grain production in Jordan at a time of possible grain shortages stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>82</sup> The Jordanian Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship and ADQ launched a \$100 million technology investment fund in 2022.<sup>83</sup>

Recently, Saudi Arabia ramped up its investments in Jordan. In June, the Saudi Public Investment Fund took a \$185 million stake (23.97 percent) in the Capital Bank of Jordan.<sup>84</sup> Jordanian and Saudi companies also signed several agreements at a convention organized by the Amman Chamber of Commerce and the Council of Saudi Chambers.<sup>85</sup> The Saudi Jordanian Investment Fund backed a \$400 million healthcare project for an academic hospital and a medical school in Amman.<sup>86</sup>

Some in Jordan believe the Gulf states are still holding back in terms of total amounts and fulfillment, but they are still unquestionably important for Jordan's economic well-being. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and the UAE rank among Jordan's top partners in energy, as well as other products and services.<sup>87</sup>

## EXTERNAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

To the extent that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are well positioned to buttress Jordan economically, Israel is the natural partner to help combat some of the country's security threats.

Chief among the kingdom's threats right now is the influx of Captagon. Jordan sits at the nexus of trafficking routes between Syria and the Gulf. Shipments of the illicit drug increased by 87 percent between 2013 and 2018 and have since accelerated.<sup>88</sup> In 2020, the Jordanian army seized 1.4 million Captagon pills. Seizures for 2022 reached a whopping 17 million pills. And while Jordan was once considered just a transit point for pills destined

80. United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation, Press Release, "UAE sends medical aid to Jordan in fight against COVID-19," June 15, 2020. (<https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2020/6/15/15-06-2020-uae-jordan>)

81. Hazem Hussain, "UAE, Egypt and Jordan sign Industrial Partnership for Sustainable Economic Growth," *Emirates News Agency* (UAE), May 29, 2022. (<https://www.wam.ae/en/details/1395303052179>)

82. Mohammad Ghazal, "Jordan, UAE, Egypt ink agreement on grains production," *The Star* (Malaysia), June 3, 2022. (<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2022/06/03/jordan-uae-egypt-ink-agreement-on-grains-production>)

83. Bill Dittman, "Benefits of a joint venture: \$ 100 million Emirati-Jordanian investment fund," *Dubai Week* (UAE), June 8, 2022. (<https://www.dubaiweek.ae/benefits-of-a-joint-venture-100-million-emirati-jordanian-investment-fund>)

84. Mathew Martin, "Saudi Wealth Fund to Take \$185 Million Jordanian Bank Stake," *Bloomberg*, June 5, 2022. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-05/saudi-wealth-fund-to-take-185-million-jordanian-bank-stake?sref=2IMrSBxY>)

85. Mays Ibrahim Mustafa, "Jordanian, Saudi companies sign slew of cooperation agreements," *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), June 22, 2022. (<https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordanian-saudi-companies-sign-slew-cooperation-agreements>)

86. Mathew Martin, "Saudi Wealth Fund's \$3 Billion Jordan Unit Aims to Ramp Up Deals," *Bloomberg*, June 6, 2022. (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-06/saudi-wealth-fund-s-3-billion-jordan-unit-aims-to-ramp-up-deals?sref=2IMrSBxY>)

87. "Economic Reform Activity," *USAID, Jordan*, June 15, 2022. (<https://www.usaid.gov/jordan/fact-sheets/jordan/economic-reform-activity>); "Annual International Trade Statistics for Jordan (HS)," *Trend Economy*, November 14, 2022. (<https://trendeconomy.com/data/h2/Jordan/TOTAL#:~:text=Top%20trading%20partners%20%28import%20sources%29%20of%20Jordan%20in,share%20of%203.5%25%20%28595%20million%20US%24%29%20More%20items>)

88. Caroline Rose and Alexander Söderholm, "The Captagon Threat: A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities," *New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy*, April 2022. ([https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/04-Captagon\\_Report-NLISAP-final-.pdf](https://newlinesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/04-Captagon_Report-NLISAP-final-.pdf))

for the Arabian Gulf, the drugs have become increasingly popular among Jordanian youth, with addiction cases on the rise.<sup>89</sup>

In 2022, amidst several reports of violent incidents, a clash along the Jordan-Syria border left 27 smugglers dead.<sup>90</sup> King Abdullah blamed Iran-linked militias for the uptick in violence.<sup>91</sup> Smuggling operations are reportedly backed by the Syrian military's Fourth Division, led by Maher al-Assad. Several Iran-aligned militias are also complicit.<sup>92</sup>

Drugs are only part of Jordan's Iran problem. In a May 2022 conversation with former U.S. National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, King Abdullah voiced concerns that Iranian forces in Syria could soon destabilize his country. With Russia expected to redeploy assets and forces from Syria to the mired war effort in Ukraine, the monarch expressed concerns that Iran could seek to fill the void. "That vacuum [left by the Russians] will be filled by the Iranians and their proxies. So unfortunately, we are looking at maybe an escalation of problems on our borders," Abdullah said.<sup>93</sup> Jordan also faces a threat from Iran-backed militias in Iraq to the north. Additional threats loom in the south, with Iranian assets reportedly operating in the Red Sea.<sup>94</sup>

The close military cooperation between Jordan and Israel is not always made public. But officials in both countries (and in Washington) attest to the fact that these ties are both wide and deep. Cooperation must continue, or even increase, particularly as Iran's malign activity grows across the Middle East. Closer ties would likely require a shift in Jordan's approach toward Israel.

## CONCLUSION

King Hussein was willing to test the boundaries of the contract between sovereign and subjects, particularly as it related to Israel. Under Abdullah, this is increasingly not the case. If anything, Abdullah appears to want to validate the concerns of the Palestinians living in Jordan. He may be trying to placate the country's Islamist, Palestinian, and other opposition groups as well after a decade of political and economic challenges. This could come at a cost.

This is not to say that Jordan's concerns are not occasionally worth voicing. Israeli policies sometimes justify such rhetoric. No country is perfect. However, Israel is not alone in encumbering the path to Middle East peace. The Palestinians, the Iranians, and other malign actors deserve plenty of blame. Nor is Israel to blame for some of the recent violent episodes on the Temple Mount. Palestinian rejectionist groups are too often responsible, both historically and recently.

The motivation for Jordan to advocate urgently for a two-state solution is certainly understandable. The frustration among Jordanians of Palestinian descent threatens Jordanian stability. But it is not at all clear that openly clashing

89. Yolande Knell, "Captagon: Jordan's undeclared war against Syria drug traffickers," *BBC* (UK), April 18, 2022. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61040359>)

90. "Jordanian army says it killed 27 drug smugglers from Syria," *BBC* (UK), January 27, 2022. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-60147224>)

91. "Jordan's King Abdullah II slams drugs-related border attacks by Iran-linked militias," *The New Arab* (UK), July 24, 2022. (<https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/jordan-king-slams-border-attacks-iran-tied-militias>)

92. Paul McLoughlin, "Syria Insight: Assad regime's captagon trade goes unchallenged," *The New Arab* (UK), August 4, 2022. (<https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/syria-insight-assad-regime-captagon-trade-goes-unchallenged>)

93. Hoover Institution, "Battlegrounds w/ H.R. McMaster | Jordan: Perspective On Integration, Conflict, Middle East Stability," *YouTube*, May 18, 2022. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjYH5LeHh2I>)

94. Yaakov Lappin, "'IRGC has covert presence in Red Sea,' says top defense researcher," *Jewish News Syndicate*, May 20, 2022. (<https://www.jns.org/irgc-has-covert-presence-in-red-sea-says-top-defense-researcher>)

with Israel, a guarantor of Jordan's regional stability, will solve Jordan's Palestinian problem. If anything, harsh rhetoric could make conditions worse.

Moreover, there has been little consideration of the security threats that a West Bank Palestinian state could pose, should one be created. The Palestinian Authority lacks the ability to govern, let alone to secure its own borders. The current Palestinian Authority chairman, Mahmoud Abbas, took power in 2005 and has refused to hold elections ever since, raising troubling questions about political legitimacy. Jordan rarely, if ever, voices these concerns.

In fact, there is insufficient Jordanian criticism of the Palestinian Authority, let alone the violent terrorist groups Hamas or Islamic Jihad. Whereas the role of Jordan was once seen as a bulwark against the extremism that was all too common across the Middle East, the Hashemite Kingdom increasingly ranks among the region's more strident voices as it relates to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

To be sure, Jordan should not be counted among the Iranian axis that actively calls for Israel's destruction (Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon). However, Jordan today does not fit within the bloc of pragmatic states, such as the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and even Saudi Arabia. Instead, it appears to have found its place among the nonaligned states of the Arab world (for example, Algeria and Kuwait). These are states that advocate stridently for the Palestinian cause and reject normalization. But there is one difference between Jordan and the other states that fit this description: The others do not urgently require sustained assistance from America, Israel, or the Gulf states. This should give the Hashemite Kingdom pause.

Historically, political and diplomatic independence has not been a deleterious thing for Jordan. This fierce sense of independence has steered the kingdom away from toxic nationalist, religious, and ideological trends, such as Islamism and Nasserism. However, in this case, it is difficult to discern what Jordan gains, apart from appeasing some of its own subjects at the expense of greater regional instability and increased prosperity.

A pragmatic bloc of allied states beckons. These states seek a better future for the Middle East.

For the sake of a stable and prosperous future, the continued influence of the United States in the Middle East, and strong governments in both Amman and Jerusalem, stronger ties between Jordan and Israel must be restored. Multiple actors have roles to play in this regard:

***The United States:*** Washington must work to restore better ties between Israel and Jordan. This relationship is important to the success of broader normalization efforts, Iran containment policies, and great power competition. Washington must therefore convey to Amman that while privately expressed opprobrium is well within bounds, needlessly hostile public rhetoric is not helpful. Such statements are rare in Washington, where officials often view Jordan as beyond reproach thanks to a prevailing view, based on Jordan's geopolitical position, that it is "too weak to fail." Washington must change this paradigm while also identifying ways to encourage economic and military ties between the two countries. This can be done in ways that strengthen America's position globally, such as encouraging jointly produced products that bypass China and create more trustworthy supply chains. Pharmaceuticals is one obvious place to start.<sup>95</sup> In the meantime, the U.S. should also encourage the parties to create mechanisms to maintain calm on the Temple Mount and to better monitor the borders of both countries to counter the flow of the weapons and narcotics that threaten both nations.

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95. Jonathan Schanzer, "How to Decouple Key Supply Chains From China," *Newsweek*, May 13, 2020. (<https://www.newsweek.com/how-decouple-key-supply-chains-china-opinion-1503036>)

**Israel:** Jerusalem should coordinate more closely with Jordan on matters concerning the Temple Mount. Jordan takes its role as custodian of the Al-Aqsa Mosque seriously. Granting Jordan what it requests to regulate the holy site (admitting agreed-upon numbers of religious authorities, guards, and other officials) is smart policy, so long as Jordan respects Israel's right to intervene during events that threaten Israeli security. A three-way mechanism with the United States should be considered. In the meantime, Israel must continue to look for ways to continue to strengthen Jordan, both militarily and economically. The Jordan Gateway project,<sup>96</sup> the Blue Green Prosperity project,<sup>97</sup> and efforts to grant Jordan more access to West Bank markets<sup>98</sup> deserve support. Military and intelligence cooperation should continue apace. Jordan remains a vital ally to Israel, and it should be treated as such. This does not grant Jordan the right to whip up anti-Israel sentiment around the region. When this occurs, Israel should address that activity through the appropriate channels.

**The UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Egypt:** All four countries must continue to find ways to encourage Jordan to integrate into the Abrahamic architecture in the Middle East. Jordan's bilateral and multilateral cooperation with these countries, and perhaps even its economic ties, should be contingent, at least in part, upon its participation in these regional constructs. They are crucial to the future of the region, and they should not be held hostage by Palestinian maximalist demands.

**Saudi Arabia:** Riyadh is not a party to the Abraham Accords. Nor is it an avowed enemy of Israel any longer. The Saudis can demonstrate to Jordan (and the rest of the Arab world) that Arab governments can maintain a principled position on the Palestinian issue while tempering public criticism and quietly cooperating on common threats. The Saudis should work with Amman to identify ways to deepen the trilateral relationship, even if a solution to the Palestinian issue is delayed.

**Jordan:** The status quo, one in which Jordan enjoys the perks of peace while simultaneously excoriating Israel for real and imagined transgressions, does not portend stability in the region. Nor does it bode well for Jordan, given its dependence upon Israel or the other countries that have committed to a fundamental transformation of the Middle East. The Hashemite Kingdom must conduct a strategic review of its peace with Israel, with an eye toward openly acknowledging and further strengthening the security and trade ties that are indispensable for Jordan. Such a review should also assess the potential dangers of allowing ties with Israel to deteriorate, particularly as Jerusalem loses patience with such scathing public rhetoric. Jordan should also conduct a review of the benefits of joining Abraham Accords structures, with the goal of pursuing stability, security, and prosperity.

Ties between Jordan and Israel are currently at a low point. But they have certainly not deteriorated beyond repair. The structures stood up by Washington, not to mention by Amman and Jerusalem, remain firmly in place. A return to the fundamentals, with a concurrent embrace of the new regional order, are key to a prosperous and secure future for both American allies. Moreover, they are key to the continued security of a U.S.-led Middle East.

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96. "Government advances plan for joint industrial park with Jordan," *Times of Israel* (Israel), July 31, 2022. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-advances-plan-for-joint-industrial-park-with-jordan>)

97. "Jordan, UAE, Israel sign MoU on blue-green prosperity feasibility studies," *The Jordan Times* (Jordan), November 8, 2022. (<https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-uae-israel-sign-mou-blue-green-prosperity-feasibility-studies>)

98. Tovah Lazaroff, "Israel and Jordan ink deal to increase Jordanian exports to West Bank," *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), November 3, 2021. (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-and-jordan-ink-deal-to-increase-jordanian-exports-to-west-bank-683939>)

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