



Policy Paper

Jordan and the Security Impacts of Operation al-Aqsa Flood



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Jordan and the Security Impacts of Operation al-Aqsa Flood

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Summary

Operation al-Aqsa Flood has had a profound impact on regional security and stability, particularly in neighboring countries most affected by the political and security repercussions of developments in Palestine. Jordan, in particular, has been at the forefront of these challenges, dealing with both immediate and potential implications for its security and stability. This shift in priorities is evident in Jordan’s political discourse, positions and actions. Numerous indicators suggest that security concerns have now eclipsed even economic issues and pressing livelihood challenges, which had previously dominated the country’s agenda in recent years.

The victory of Republican candidate Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential election has heightened Jordan's fears and security concerns. In the coming period, Jordan will likely face an unfriendly Republican administration with a negative agenda, as demonstrated during Trump’s previous term. This coincides with the extremist tendencies of the Israeli right wing, which continues to issue persistent threats against Jordan.

The policy paper analyzes the key security challenges and concerns facing Jordan in light of the repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood on its stability. It evaluates Jordan’s response to these challenges and outlines future strategies to address them and mitigate their adverse effects.

First: Challenges and Security Concerns

A recent poll of 100 Jordanian elites—including former government officials, parliamentarians, party leaders, community figures, and trade unionists—outlined Jordan’s key priorities amidst pressing challenges. The survey found that addressing security concerns and countering right-wing Israeli threats were the primary focus, with 48% of respondents emphasizing the importance of strengthening the domestic front. This was deemed the most critical task for the newly elected parliament. Economic and livelihood challenges ranked second, with 33% prioritizing these issues. Political reform was identified as a priority by 8%, while public freedoms ranked lowest.

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Jordan faces multiple security concerns stemming from the repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood. These concerns arise on two levels:

✓ **First:** General Sources of Concern in Many Arab Countries, Most Notably:

- ▶ 1. Fear of widespread public anger in response to Israeli massacres and crimes in the Gaza Strip (GS), combined with the weak and ineffective stance of Arab governments in supporting the Palestinian people or halting the genocide in GS, has led many Arab countries to suppress public expressions of solidarity. Instead, they have limited their response to political statements condemning the massacres and expressing support for Palestinians.
- ▶ 2. Many Arab governments are increasingly worried about the adverse impact of Operation al-Aqsa Flood on the future of the Palestinian Authority (PA). This concern arises from the PA's declining status and popularity within Palestinian society, attributed to its perceived weak stances, negative roles, and continued security coordination with the Israeli authorities to counter resistance activities in the West Bank (WB). Opinion polls consistently reveal a significant drop in the PA's popularity and a record-low level of public trust.
- ▶ 3. The growing fear among many Arab countries stems from the increasing influence of Islamic-oriented Palestinian resistance movements, which triggered Operation al-Aqsa Flood and have been leading the confrontation with the Israeli forces for over 13 months. These concerns have been heightened by neutral opinion polls showing Hamas's rising popularity among Palestinians. Many Arab states worry that this growing support for the Palestinian resistance in the Arab world could strengthen Islamic movements within their own borders. For example, in Jordan, the Islamic movement recently secured 31 out of 138 parliamentary seats—the highest number it has achieved since the 1950s.
- ▶ 4. Concerns are growing over the strengthening of Iran's role and its political and security influence in the region following the repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, particularly in light of shifts in public sentiment towards Iran in the Arab world and the ongoing sectarian conflict. Iran's position, along with the active participation of Lebanese Hizbullah, the Yemeni Ansar Allah group, and Iraqi resistance factions in Operation al-Aqsa Flood, has helped improve the image of Iran and its allies, boosting their popularity. This shift raises alarm among many Arab officials about the potential political and security ramifications.



✔ **Second:** Security Concerns, Particularly in Jordan, Regarding the Impacts of Operation al-Aqsa Flood including the following:

- ▶ 1. Jordan's historically strained relations with the Israeli right have been further exacerbated by continuous threats from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders of the Religious Zionist movement. Jordan's concerns about the extreme right-wing Zionist stances are based on the following factors:
 - a. The Israeli right-wing's firm stance against the establishment of a Palestinian state is evident in the maps presented by right-wing leaders at international forums, which erase WB and suggest an alternative homeland in Jordan instead of a Palestinian state on part of the Palestinian territories. This position has been reiterated by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, despite ongoing protests and condemnations from Jordan.
 - b. The process of annexing the Jordan Valley and Area C of WB, which makes up 61% of it, has begun. On 11/11/2024, Smotrich declared that "2025 will be the year of sovereignty in Judea and Samaria [WB]." He confirmed that he had directed the Settlement Directorate to start preparing the necessary infrastructure for imposing sovereignty on WB. Netanyahu has expressed support for a plan to annex significant portions of it into Israeli sovereignty.
 - c. Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, approximately 250 thousand settlers in the WB applied for firearm licenses. Tens of thousands have already been armed under a systematic policy led by extremist National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.
 - d. Heightened security and economic pressures are being imposed on Palestinians in WB, aiming to push them to emigrate to Jordan. At the same time, threats of forced displacement (transfer) and the distribution of leaflets urging residents to move to Jordan have intensified. In September 2024, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi stated, "any attempt to displace Palestinians from WB towards Jordan will be viewed by us as a declaration of war and we will work with it accordingly."
- ▶ 2. Jordan fears that Israel's far-right coalition might reconsider its traditional stance on Jordan's political stability, potentially aiming to create chaos to facilitate the forced displacement of Palestinians from WB and impose the "alternative homeland" project. This long-standing proposal by the Israeli right is viewed as a radical solution to the Palestine issue. Jordan's concerns are further heightened by the growing influence of the Religious Zionist movement within Israel's military and security institutions, which have historically supported Jordan's political stability. Adding to these fears is the possibility that the Trump administration could align with Israel's far-right, especially given Trump's campaign remarks about Israel's small size and the need for expansion.



► 3. Escalating Security Challenges on Jordan’s Western, Northern and Eastern Borders :

- a. On the west border with occupied Palestine, fueled by anger over the genocide in GS, attempts to infiltrate the border for armed attacks against Israeli targets have significantly increased since 7/10/2023. While many of these attempts were thwarted, notable incidents include the 9/9/2024 attack by Jordanian truck driver Maher al-Jazi on the King Hussein Bridge, where he killed three Israeli security personnel, and the 18/10/2024 border operation by Jordanian youths Amer Qawas and Husam Abu Ghazaleh, who wounded two Israeli soldiers south of the Dead Sea.

In a significant security move, on 30/10/2024, the Israeli army announced the formation of a new military division along the east border with Jordan, citing the need to prevent infiltration and weapon smuggling. Simultaneously, Israeli authorities are advancing the establishment of a separation fence between Jordan and Israel, a development viewed by Jordan as an attempt to eliminate any future geographical contiguity between Jordan and occupied Palestine.



- b. On the northern border with Syria, the activity of armed groups smuggling weapons and drugs into Jordan has dramatically increased, using both traditional methods and drones. Jordanian authorities recently announced the downing of several drones on Jordanian territory, though details were not disclosed. Many sources suggest that the weapons smuggled across the Syrian-Jordanian border are destined for the Palestinian territories, specifically WB. Jordan considers such smuggling operations an unacceptable violation of its borders, emphasizing that these armed groups traffic not only weapons but also drugs.
- c. On the border with Iraq, thousands of armed Iraqi youths have gathered for weeks in response to escalating Israeli crimes in GS, demanding the border with Jordan be opened to join Operation al-Aqsa Flood. This has triggered a state of security alert along Jordan’s eastern front.

- 4. In the context of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which saw the participation of Iraqi and Yemeni support fronts, and amid ongoing confrontations between Iran and Israel in recent months, Jordan’s airspace has become a zone of intense clashes. Hundreds of rockets and drones have been launched from Iran, Iraq and Yemen toward Israeli targets.

On 28/1/2024, Iraqi factions launched a drone attack on a US military post at the Jordanian-Syrian border, killing 3 US soldiers and injuring 34 others. After the Jordanian authorities confirmed that the attack occurred at al-Tanf base within Syrian territory, they issued an official statement condemning “the terrorist attack that targeted



an outpost on the border with Syria, killing three US soldiers and injuring many others from the US forces that are cooperating with Jordan in countering terrorism and securing the border.”

Second: How Has Jordan Addressed Security Challenges?

Jordan’s approach to addressing security challenges from various sources has evolved throughout the 13 months of Operation al-Aqsa Flood. Its efforts have concentrated on mitigating the repercussions and undesirable effects of these challenges while working to prevent their escalation.

On the political level, Jordan has mobilized both politically and diplomatically to counter the Israeli right-wing's threats to forcibly displace WB residents, strengthening its cooperation with Egypt, which faces the same risks. The joint efforts of the two countries led to the adoption of a resolution at the Joint Arab and Islamic Summit in Riyadh on 11/11/2023, which declared a unified Arab and Islamic stance supporting Palestinian steadfastness on their land and rejecting Israeli plans for forced displacement. The resolution expressed solidarity with Jordan and Egypt in confronting these plans, which threaten the national security of both countries.

Jordan has actively worked to develop cooperative relations with the PA to address shared security challenges, aiming to strengthen the PA’s role and presence in WB amid declining popularity among Palestinians in favor of resistance movements. Despite this, Jordan has consistently maintained security communication with Hamas for many years. However, it has yet to respond to growing calls within the Jordanian elite and popular movements to strengthen ties with Hamas and other Palestinian resistance factions, seeking to achieve a more balanced approach in its relations with all Palestinian parties.

Unlike many Arab countries, the Jordanian government was keen to address the popular reactions to the genocidal crimes in GS, providing a broad space for expressing anger and solidarity with the Palestinian people. This allowed protests to continue across Jordan since 7/10/2023, spreading widely throughout the country. However, the Jordanian authorities enforced a strict policy to prevent these movements from reaching the Israeli embassy in Amman and from reaching the border areas with the occupied Palestinian territories.



The official policy successfully contained public anger and avoided negative repercussions on the security situation. However, it did not quell ongoing dissatisfaction with the government's stance. Popular demands persisted, calling not only for the recall of the Jordanian ambassador and the freezing of the Israeli embassy in Amman, but for a complete severance of relations with Israel.



Additionally, there were continued calls to prevent trucks bound for Israel from crossing Jordanian territory, especially given Israel's tight and unjust siege of GS, which has been preventing humanitarian aid from reaching those in need.

As for the border challenges, Jordan has bolstered its security by increasing military forces along its borders with Israel, Syria and Iraq to address cross-border threats and prevent any infiltration through its territory into Israel.

Jordanian officials have strongly rejected the use of its airspace for military exchanges between Israel and Iran, along with Iraqi and Yemeni resistance factions, calling such actions a violation of the country's sovereignty. They have issued a warning that any missiles or drones crossing Jordanian airspace will be met with force and shot down.

Third: Potential Scenarios for Security Challenges

Jordan seems to be facing three potential scenarios regarding the security repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood in the near future, which can be summarized as follows:

- **First Scenario:** A situation where security challenges and threats to stability decline.
- **Second Scenario:** A situation where security challenges escalate, with more serious repercussions for Jordan's stability.
- **Third Scenario:** A situation where security repercussions persist at their current levels.



Several determinants and factors can influence the likelihood of these scenarios, including:

- ▶ 1. The trajectory and expected duration of the Israeli confrontation with GS and Lebanon. For the prolonged escalation of the conflict would amplify the security challenges and consequences facing Jordan, whereas a resolution to the confrontation, on the other hand, could foster calm and reduce the risks to Jordanian security. While growing signs suggest a potential truce on the Israel-Lebanon front, the prospects for ending the war in GS remain uncertain. Undoubtedly, the stance of Donald Trump on the continuation of the war following his presidential term, which begins on 20/1/2025, will play a significant role in shaping the course and duration of the conflict.
- ▶ 2. The future of the situation in WB and the potential for escalating military confrontation between Israeli forces and resistance groups in the coming period. This includes the expected behavior of settlers following Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz's decision on 22/11/2024 to suspend administrative detention warrants for settlers accused of attacking Palestinians, which may lead to an increase in such attacks.
- ▶ 3. The future of the PA, including its status, popularity and ability to maintain security control in WB, as well as the positions of the Israeli government and the Trump administration regarding a potential role for the PA in managing GS after the war.
- ▶ 4. Israeli measures to annex Area C of WB, including the Jordan Valley near the Jordanian border, are likely to intensify pressure on local residents, heighten security threats to Jordan, and escalate the risk of forcible transfer of WB Palestinians.
- ▶ 5. The Trump administration's implementation of the "Deal of the Century" faces a critical choice: whether to prioritize advancing the annexation of WB, risking setbacks in normalization efforts with Saudi Arabia and other Arab and Muslim countries, or to postpone annexation in favor of accelerating progress on the Abraham Accords.
- ▶ 6. A potential military confrontation between Iran and Israel, stemming from Iran's threats to retaliate for Israel's attack on 26/10/2024, could trigger a cycle of reactions and mutual escalation. Such developments would intensify security risks for Jordan and the broader region, further complicate Jordan's position, and increase the likelihood of an expanded and prolonged conflict.

Given the mentioned determinants, the likelihood of escalating security challenges for Jordan appears significant, especially with no clear indicators suggesting de-escalation in GS. Moreover, the intensification of settler activities in WB and the



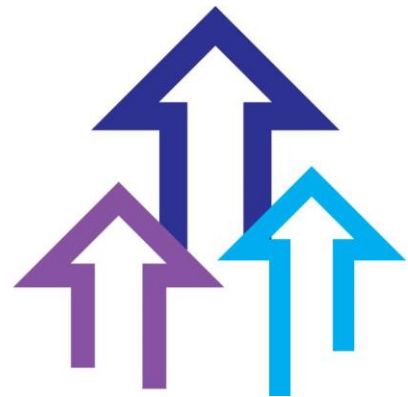
Israeli government's announcement to begin implementing the annexation of Area C into Israeli sovereignty are likely to further perpetuate the escalation and heighten risks to Jordan's security and stability.

If the Trump administration chooses to de-escalate tensions in the region and reduce its involvement in military conflicts, even amid a potential decline in escalation in Lebanon, GS, and between Israel and Iran, it is likely to trade a de-escalation of the Israeli war on GS for the right-wing Israeli government's implementation of its plan to annex WB. Such a move would heighten Jordan's security burdens and pave the way for significant future threats.

Fourth: Jordan's Options for Dealing with Security Challenges

Jordan is clearly grappling with significant challenges that threaten its security and stability, given the diverse sources of danger and the growing indications of their persistence and escalation in the near future. This underscores the legitimacy of Jordan's concerns regarding the security implications of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which are neither unfounded nor overstated. These concerns inevitably influence the priorities of the state, the Jordanian elite, and public sentiment. In light of these repercussions and threats, Jordan faces three challenging options that demand careful evaluation and strategic planning:

- ✓ 1. **Option One:** Maintain the current conservative and cautious policy to address political and security challenges, continuing a stance of disassociation and neutrality.
- ✓ 2. **Option Two:** Adopt a proactive approach, emphasizing initiative, engagement and a positive role in tackling political and security challenges.
- ✓ 3. **Option Three:** Yield to external pressures, passively adapt to security challenges, and align with the Trump administration and certain Arab parties on political and security arrangements.



If Jordan opts to maintain a policy of neutrality and distance itself from political and security challenges, these challenges are likely to persist and intensify. This is particularly true given the negative trends associated with Israel's far-right government and the anticipated policies of the Trump administration regarding the future of WB.



If Jordan adopts a policy of yielding to pressure by aligning with the Trump administration and certain Arab parties involved in the normalization project and the “Abrahamic Accords” across their security, political and economic dimensions, it is unlikely to shield the country from imminent dangers or safeguard its national interests to achieve security and stability. Instead, such a strategy of weakness, passive adaptation, and concessions may heighten the risks, exposing Jordan to increased political and security threats, attacks on its interests, and challenges to its stability and regional role.

If Jordan adopts a new approach centered on initiative, engagement and reinforcing its role in addressing security and political challenges, it will undoubtedly need to clarify its stance on managing several critical issues, including:

- ▶ 1. Managing relations with the Israeli right wing, given its ongoing threats and provocative actions that disregard Jordan’s vital interests and show little regard for its security and stability.
- ▶ 2. Navigating a balanced and cautious relationship with the Trump administration to strengthen Jordan’s position while avoiding unnecessary tensions. This includes leveraging its experience during the 2017–2021 period, when the US embassy was moved to Jerusalem, and the “Deal of the Century” was introduced.
- ▶ 3. Ensuring regional and international support for Jordanian positions that prioritize national political and security interests, thereby avoiding the burden of managing these challenges alone.
- ▶ 4. Establishing more balanced relations with all parties involved in the Palestinian equation and moving away from the approach of exclusively relying on the PA.
- ▶ 5. Defining its approach to political reform at the local level and strengthening ties with active societal and political forces. This should contribute to bolstering its internal cohesion and enhancing its national resilience.

Fifth: Recommendations

This paper emphasizes the importance of resisting the temptation to passively adapt to the political and security dynamics shaped by the Trump era and the Israeli right wing. It also acknowledges the failure of maintaining a neutral and disengaged policy, which has not shielded Jordan from the ongoing security challenges. Therefore, the paper advocates for a new approach based on proactive initiative, increased interaction, and strengthening Jordan’s role in addressing security threats and political demands.



Despite the difficulties and challenges this approach may bring, requiring boldness and courage, it remains the most effective and secure path to safeguarding Jordan's national interests and ensuring its long-term security and stability. In light of this, the paper proposes the following recommendations:

- ▶ 1. Focusing on strengthening the internal national front, which serves as the cornerstone of national resilience, while consolidating the elements of strength and capability to address security and political challenges. Advancing the political reform and modernization agenda, which is a vital pillar for enhancing Jordan's stability, resilience and strength, and curbing foreign interference in its internal affairs.
- ▶ 2. Fostering openness to relationships with all components of the Palestinian landscape to address the security and political challenges facing both Jordan and Palestine. Strengthening the position of the PA to navigate the obligations of the Trump era and prevent its collapse, which would pose a significant threat to Jordan's interests and its capacity to withstand and navigate the pressures of the coming phase.
- ▶ 3. Strengthening relations with China and the European Union while leveraging their differing positions and priorities from those of the Trump administration on various issues, particularly the establishment of a Palestinian state, rejection of the "Deal of the Century," opposition to the annexation plan, and settlement building policy in WB.
- ▶ 4. Continuing political and diplomatic efforts to rally regional and international support for Jordan's and Egypt's stance against the forced transfer of Palestinians from WB and GS, while maintaining close coordination with Egypt on this matter.
- ▶ 5. Preparedness to take concrete actions in response to Israeli escalation and threats to Jordan's national security, such as halting normalization, cutting diplomatic ties, and annulling the Wadi Araba Agreement.

