

# Regional Reactions to Israel's Protests

by [Frances McDonough \(/experts/frances-mcdonough\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

**Many Middle Eastern outlets have used the crisis to reinforce their inflammatory rhetoric, but some have provided nuanced analysis through the lenses of democratic principles and Arab-Israel peace.**

Israel's [unprecedented protests \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/pausing-israels-judicial-overhaul-toward-compromise-or-deepening-crisis\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/pausing-israels-judicial-overhaul-toward-compromise-or-deepening-crisis) in recent weeks have caught the attention of observers across the Middle East and North Africa. Regional responses have varied, including among Israel's Arab partners. Many commentators have capitalized on the strife to advance negative portrayals of Israel, particularly after its forces conducted raids on al-Aqsa Mosque. Yet some have genuinely sought to analyze and explain the ongoing events. A closer look at the responses provides a useful picture of how Israel is currently viewed in the region, and how its dynamics with the Palestinians remain central to those perceptions.

## Capitalizing on the Strife

Anti-Israel voices have largely used the protests to spread their usual messaging. This trend was especially true in Iranian outlets such as the [Tasnim News Agency \(https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2023/03/28/2872591/house-of-occupiers-on-fire-iranian-spokesman-says-after-anti-bibi-protests\)](https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2023/03/28/2872591/house-of-occupiers-on-fire-iranian-spokesman-says-after-anti-bibi-protests) and [Tehran Times \(https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/483053/Expert-in-Israeli-affairs-The-language-of-resistance-is-the\)](https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/483053/Expert-in-Israeli-affairs-The-language-of-resistance-is-the), which have published numerous stories arguing that Israel's social unity is eroding, its security services are vulnerable, and its relations with the United States are deteriorating. They convey this message in part by disseminating videos and photos of protesters and police violently clashing without explaining the context in which these incidents are occurring.

Media commentators in [Algeria \(https://www.elkhabar.com/press/article/226179/%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%84%D9%87/\)](https://www.elkhabar.com/press/article/226179/%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%84%D9%87/), [Lebanon \(https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/nasrallah-reads-us-well-israel-is-falling-apart-israeli-med/\)](https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/nasrallah-reads-us-well-israel-is-falling-apart-israeli-med/), [Syria \(http://alwatan.sy/archives/340174/\)](http://alwatan.sy/archives/340174/), [Tunisia \(https://twitter.com/alqanat9tv/status/1640732729091162114?s=61&t=IDQvFTsNPujiPU6KTut4Xw\)](https://twitter.com/alqanat9tv/status/1640732729091162114?s=61&t=IDQvFTsNPujiPU6KTut4Xw), [Turkey \(https://www.sabah.com.tr/galeri/dunya/son-dakika-israilde-ic-savas-alarmi-halk-sokaklara-dokuldu-her-yer-ates-altinda-netanyahudan-flas-hazirlik\)](https://www.sabah.com.tr/galeri/dunya/son-dakika-israilde-ic-savas-alarmi-halk-sokaklara-dokuldu-her-yer-ates-altinda-netanyahudan-flas-hazirlik), and elsewhere have likewise portrayed the protests as a precursor to Israel's "imminent collapse," with some describing the demonstrations as "out of control" and the internal divisions as "permanent." One [writer \(https://www.echoroukonline.com/%d9%84%d8%a7-%d8%aa%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%af%d9%88%d8%a7-%d9%86%d8%aa%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7%d9%87%d9%88\)](https://www.echoroukonline.com/%d9%84%d8%a7-%d8%aa%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%af%d9%88%d8%a7-%d9%86%d8%aa%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7%d9%87%d9%88) in Algeria advised the region to "let Israel destroy itself."

In Qatar, Al Jazeera has [emphasized \(https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/31/palestine-advocates-see-opportunity-in-biden-netanyahu-discord\)](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/31/palestine-advocates-see-opportunity-in-biden-netanyahu-discord) the alleged divisions in U.S.-Israel relations, citing President Biden's [recent comments \(https://www.timesofisrael.com/biden-israel-cannot-continue-down-this-road-no-netanyahu-invite-in-near-term/\)](https://www.timesofisrael.com/biden-israel-cannot-continue-down-this-road-no-netanyahu-invite-in-near-term/) as "the latest step in exposing the idea of 'shared values' as a foundational myth of the relationship." Another article [described \(https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2023/3/28/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-](https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2023/3/28/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-)

[https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq\\_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20](https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20) and <https://ammannet.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>, for example, pundits have described the crisis as a

[https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq\\_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20](https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20) and <https://ammannet.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>), for example, pundits have described the crisis as a

Commentary about sociopolitical “weakening” has been seen even in countries with which Israel has official relations. In the [United Arab Emirates](https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20) ([https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq\\_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20](https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq_UAE/status/1640405769257402370?s=20)) and [Jordan](https://ammannet.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9)

(<https://ammannet.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>), for example, pundits have described the crisis as a

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## Official Reactions and the Palestinian Factor

As noted above, recent Israeli raids on al-Aqsa Mosque have exacerbated these negative portrayals, as has the annual flow of Jewish holiday visitors to the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif. To be sure, many commentators have legitimately questioned the conduct of the raids, including several [U.S. legislators](https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2023-04-07/ty-article/.premium/progressive-democrats-slam-israel-over-violence-against-palestinian-worshippers-at-al-aqsa/00000187-5829-dde0-afb7-7e3b34280000) (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2023-04-07/ty-article/.premium/progressive-democrats-slam-israel-over-violence-against-palestinian-worshippers-at-al-aqsa/00000187-5829-dde0-afb7-7e3b34280000>). Yet some voices have also seized on the clashes as another opportunity to rally anti-Israel sentiment.

For example, during an April 9 phone call with his Algerian counterpart Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi [emphasized](https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-president-calls-for-united-front-against-israel-2023-4-10-0/) (<https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/iran-president-calls-for-united-front-against-israel-2023-4-10-0/>) that Tehran’s “axis of resistance” was benefiting from such dynamics, then called for the formation of a wider anti-Israel coalition in the region. Elsewhere, the raids spurred [Twitter users](https://twitter.com/mhz126/status/1643663549103734816?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E164366354910) ([https://twitter.com/mhz126/status/1643663549103734816?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E164366354910](https://twitter.com/mhz126/status/1643663549103734816?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E164366354910)) and [activist groups](https://www.echoroukonline.com/%d9%85%d8%ba%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%a8%d8%a9-%d9%8a%d8%b7%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a8%d8%a5%d9%84%d8%ba%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%a7%d8%aa%d9%81%d8%a7%d9%82%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b7%d8%a8%d9%8a) (<https://www.echoroukonline.com/%d9%85%d8%ba%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%a8%d8%a9-%d9%8a%d8%b7%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a8%d8%a5%d9%84%d8%ba%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%a7%d8%aa%d9%81%d8%a7%d9%82%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b7%d8%a8%d9%8a>) to renew their critiques of the Abraham Accords and other Arab-Israel normalization steps.

Regarding countries that hold normalization accords or peace treaties with Israel, none have issued official government statements about its judicial crisis or protests, in keeping with their traditional tendency of avoiding public comments about domestic developments in other countries. Yet several officials have openly criticized Israel’s recent posture toward the Palestinians, particularly the actions of Bezalel Smotrich, the far-right politician who heads the Finance Ministry and has been given a significant role in the Defense Ministry as well.

For example, Smotrich recently made [comments](https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/21/middleeast/israel-smotrich-palestinians-intl/index.html) (<https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/21/middleeast/israel-smotrich-palestinians-intl/index.html>) calling for the Palestinian town of Hawara to be “erased” and denying the existence of the Palestinian people. The Foreign Ministries of [Bahrain](https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=7824&language=en-US&ItemId=21661) (<https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=7824&language=en-US&ItemId=21661>), [Egypt](https://twitter.com/MfaEgypt/status/1637862034573254676?s=20) (<https://twitter.com/MfaEgypt/status/1637862034573254676?s=20>), [Morocco](https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-23/ty-article/.premium/morocco-joins-list-of-countries-condemning-israeli-fm-remarks-on-palestinian-people/00000187-0e88-d26b-a5f7-dff8b68f0000?lts=1680187966876) (<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-23/ty-article/.premium/morocco-joins-list-of-countries-condemning-israeli-fm-remarks-on-palestinian-people/00000187-0e88-d26b-a5f7-dff8b68f0000?lts=1680187966876>), and the [UAE](https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2023/3/21/21-03-2023-uae-palestinian) (<https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2023/3/21/21-03-2023-uae-palestinian>) strongly rejected this rhetoric, calling it “irresponsible” and “racist.” Shortly before this incident, Jordan’s Foreign Ministry had strongly condemned Smotrich’s appearance at a conference in Paris, where he stood behind a podium that displayed a map depicting the Hashemite Kingdom as part of “[Greater Israel](http://ammannet.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B4-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%86)” (<http://ammannet.net/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B4-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%86>).

The raids on al-Aqsa Mosque spurred even more direct condemnations. After an emergency meeting called by Jordan, the Arab League issued a statement [rejecting](https://www.facebook.com/arab.league/posts/pfbid02qqb3EgQmPfCLotZRt9u4QowAh57Rxeez7aVVbt4Ec8DoVqv26KGwtdnEyV2Lupl)

(<https://www.facebook.com/arab.league/posts/pfbid02qqb3EgQmPfCLotZRt9u4QowAh57Rxeez7aVVbt4Ec8DoVqv26KGwtdnEyV2Lupl>)

Israel's "crimes against defenseless Muslim worshipers" and warning of potential escalation. Statements from the Foreign Ministries of Bahrain (<https://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=7824&language=en-US&ItemId=21732>), Egypt (<https://twitter.com/MfaEgypt/status/1643506692640985088?s=20>), Jordan (<https://twitter.com/ForeignMinistry/status/1643709628285419520?s=20>), and the UAE (<https://www.mofaic.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2023/4/5/05-04-2023-uae-aqsa>) likewise condemned the raids, with some calling for Israeli authorities to avoid escalation and respect Amman's custodianship over the holy site.

Indeed, the dynamics surrounding the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif and Palestine writ large are still the main lens through which many in the region depict Israel's politics and policies, even in situations unrelated to Israeli-Palestinian relations. Besides the strong government reactions noted above, this perception can be seen in much of the region's media commentary. For example, one writer [suggested](https://www.raialyoum.com/israels-downward-trajectory/) (<https://www.raialyoum.com/israels-downward-trajectory/>) that "Palestinian resistance to occupation is a key underlying cause" of Israel's current judicial protests, while an Al Jazeera article [argued](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/31/palestine-advocates-see-opportunity-in-biden-netanyahu-discord) (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/31/palestine-advocates-see-opportunity-in-biden-netanyahu-discord>) that the demonstrations and Israel's "discord" with Washington present an opportunity to bring the Palestinian issue to the forefront.

## An Opportunity for Analysis

Less commonly, some observers in the region have contextualized and analyzed the protests—a sign that certain people now see Israel as a country to be studied like any other. Some have even voiced support for the protests in the interest of democratic gains.

In Egypt, for example, opposition media presenter Mohamed Nasser [hailed](https://www.facebook.com/Mohammed.Naser.Official/videos/966909881339705/) (<https://www.facebook.com/Mohammed.Naser.Official/videos/966909881339705/>) the protesters for "defending their rights and democracy," describing the demonstrations as a "Hebrew Spring." Amr Adeeb [used](https://twitter.com/Elhekayashow/status/1640464967051747330) (<https://twitter.com/Elhekayashow/status/1640464967051747330>) the same sobriquet on MBC Masr, noting that some Arabs are "waiting" for internal divisions to collapse the Israeli state—something that will not happen, he concluded.

Some voices on social media have likewise attempted to provide greater clarity and challenge the narrative that Israel is simply collapsing. One academic and media columnist [suggested](https://twitter.com/abdulaah_d/status/1640420681132257280?s=20) ([https://twitter.com/abdulaah\\_d/status/1640420681132257280?s=20](https://twitter.com/abdulaah_d/status/1640420681132257280?s=20)) that the protests are an internal matter "within the framework of the struggle of political parties," describing predictions that Israeli institutions will fall apart as a "baseless lie." Another researcher [provided](https://twitter.com/AzizAlghashian/status/1640759615867551744?s=20) (<https://twitter.com/AzizAlghashian/status/1640759615867551744?s=20>) resources to better understand the judicial overhaul plan and the corresponding backlash.

Nadim Koteich, an influential Lebanese journalist operating in the UAE, provided a nuanced [critique](https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-rejected-our-fanatics-what-are-you-doing-about-yours/) (<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/we-rejected-our-fanatics-what-are-you-doing-about-yours/>) of Netanyahu's coalition in the context of Arab-Israeli peace, but also noted the important role of "those who hold firm to the belief in, and the pursuit of, a future where peaceful coexistence in the Middle East is possible." In [another piece](https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-isnt-perfect-but-its-an-example-for-the-mideast-rule-of-law-democracy-uae-1640759615867551744) (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-isnt-perfect-but-its-an-example-for-the-mideast-rule-of-law-democracy-uae-1640759615867551744>), he wrote that the demonstrations showed the "maturity of Israel's democracy" since protesters were fighting for the rule of law regardless of the country's current national security concerns. He also rejected using the Palestinian situation as the "sole metric by which to measure Israel," arguing that the protests provide a "valuable lesson for the rest of the Middle East."

Perhaps most important, an appetite for visible cooperation with Israel persists despite the strong reactions to the current crisis. Most recently, the UAE [finalized](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-uae-sign-free-trade-pact-into-effect-2023-03-26/) (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-uae-sign-free-trade-pact-into-effect-2023-03-26/>) a free trade agreement with Israel aimed at strengthening bilateral economic ties, while President Muhammad bin Zayed and Netanyahu [expressed](https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy/1680624917-israel-s-netanyahu-uae-president-vow-to-promote-peace-will-meet-in-near-future) (<https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy/1680624917-israel-s-netanyahu-uae-president-vow-to-promote-peace-will-meet-in-near-future>) their desire to "promote peace" and "continue dialogue" during an April 4 phone call. And in Morocco, the palace [has defended](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/moroccan-palace-asks-islamist-party-stop-criticizing-ties-with-israel-2023-03-13/) (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/moroccan-palace-asks-islamist-party-stop-criticizing-ties-with-israel-2023-03-13/>) its diplomatic ties with Israel against criticism from the country's largest Islamist party.

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## RECOMMENDED

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BRIEF ANALYSIS

## Repatriation from Northeast Syria and the Effort to Counter Violent Extremism

April 19, 2023, starting at 2:00 p.m. EDT (1800 GMT)

♦  
Ian Moss

(/policy-analysis/repatriation-northeast-syria-and-effort-counter-violent-extremism)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

## Iran's Military Drone Program: Security Implications and Policy Responses

April 20, 2023, starting at 12:00 noon EDT (1600 GMT)

♦  
Kenneth McKenzie Jr.,  
Valerie Lincy,  
Damien Spleeters

(/policy-analysis/irans-military-drone-program-security-implications-and-policy-responses)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Apr 10, 2023

♦  
Joshua Levkowitz

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