

# The Brotherhood May Have Pushed Jordan Too Far This Time

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Brief Analysis

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**As revelations continue to unfold about the group's involvement in militant plots, weapons smuggling, and coordination with foreign accomplices, Amman will likely feel obligated to crack down—the question is how much?**

**O**n April 15, Jordanian authorities announced the arrest of sixteen members of the local Muslim Brotherhood (MB) branch on charges of acquiring explosives and manufacturing rockets and drones. Two of the suspects previously served on the group's Shura Council, a top MB decisionmaking body. Although they were arrested well before their plots posed a concrete threat, their publicized confessions indicate coordination abroad in Lebanon, presumably with major terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah. In addition to receiving training there, they confessed to receiving money and equipment from foreign sources. Officials are especially concerned about a potential Iranian connection given Tehran's **increased attempts (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-targets-jordan-kingdom-joins-theocracys-list-enemies>)** to destabilize the kingdom through violent cross-border smuggling of weapons and drugs, among other activities.

These revelations come amid escalating friction between Jordanian authorities and the MB. The plots being investigated date back to 2021, but tensions have reached new heights since 2023. The Gaza war has generated significant public anger in the kingdom, which the MB has exploited to bolster its popularity, win big in last year's parliamentary election, and challenge the government's policies toward Israel and the United States in an increasingly confrontational manner—in some cases even crossing Amman's well-established security red lines. The investigation will force a reevaluation of the government's approach to the MB, and perhaps even a reexamination of its public messaging regarding the Gaza war and its permissiveness toward public protests.

## Upending the Government's Modus Vivendi with the MB?

**T**he Brotherhood has been active in Jordan since the 1940s, and its relations with the government remained largely cooperative for decades even as other political parties were banned in the 1950s. In exchange, the

Brotherhood usually (but not always) supported the palace's foreign policy and security measures, particularly against communist and socialist parties.

Relations became more adversarial near the turn of the century after the Brotherhood vociferously opposed the 1994 peace treaty with Israel. The Arab Spring movement that emerged in 2011 saw further deterioration. Unlike other states in the region, however, Jordan did not completely crack down on the MB, instead seeking to limit its influence. In 2020, for example, the kingdom's highest court confirmed a government decision to formally disband the group for failure to register as a charity but allowed its political party—registered separately as the Islamic Action Front (IAF)—to continue operating.

Yet the current Gaza war has seen another escalation, with the MB repeatedly accusing the government of cooperating with Israel and not doing enough to support the Palestinians. As Jordan's most organized political movement, the MB also spearheaded public demonstrations in which anti-war protesters routinely criticized the government, the military, and the intelligence services. Building on [this momentum](#) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/king-abdullah-must-show-trump-practical-arab-ideas-gaza>), the group took part in the 2024 election and emerged as the largest opposition bloc in parliament, exceeding the predictions of the kingdom's General Intelligence Directorate.

Jordanian security circles are particularly worried about the MB's vocal wartime identification with Hamas, an organization that was considered such a grave security threat that it was expelled from the kingdom in 1999. The MB's recent statements have mirrored many Hamas positions, while protests organized by the group have been dominated by Hamas flags and pro-Hamas slogans—including some paying allegiance to the terrorist organization's leaders. At least one such demonstration even featured Hamas leaders [virtually addressing](#) (<https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1703279-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B9%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%89-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%95%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%94%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%9F>) Jordanian protesters. Some MB-led events have also challenged the government's ban against demonstrations close to the Israeli border or in front of foreign embassies, especially the Israeli and U.S. embassies. These incidents have sparked multiple clashes with security forces, most recently on April 11.

Regarding terrorist plots, authorities uncovered and detonated explosive caches in Amman last June, noting that they were likely of Iranian origin. Some of the suspects linked to those caches were junior MB members. Although authorities accepted the organization's argument that these were cases of individual members going rogue, their outlook changed a few months later.

In October, two armed MB members were killed by Israeli forces after infiltrating the border and opening fire, injuring two Israeli soldiers. The MB initially [appeared to endorse](#) ([https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/jordans-muslim-brotherhood-claims-gunmen-who-were-killed-after-breaching-israeli-border/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/jordans-muslim-brotherhood-claims-gunmen-who-were-killed-after-breaching-israeli-border/)) the attack, then later distanced itself from the incident under pressure, once again claiming that the suspects were acting individually and not as representatives of the group. Yet MB leaders still tacitly legitimized the infiltration as motivated by “supporting the resistance.”

Meanwhile, the MB's growing challenges to the government have exposed tensions within Jordanian officialdom. Since the beginning of the Gaza war, Amman has adopted a rhetorical and diplomatic tone that mirrors public anger toward Israel's conduct during the conflict. This stance is in keeping with the palace's traditional avoidance of domestic confrontation when possible, with proponents seeing it as a way to maintain stability. Yet critics argue that

the heightened rhetoric has only exacerbated public anger and legitimized the MB's stance.

An early indication of mounting official frustration with the Brotherhood's messaging emerged this February when King Abdullah lashed out against "those who receive orders from abroad." He delivered these remarks to an audience of military veterans, generally considered one of the kingdom's most conservative constituencies. At the time, his choice of audience and harsh tone were seen as a warning (<https://www.ammanjo.co/article/227609>) to the MB and a sign of displeasure with the tenor of the protests.

## Amman's Options

**T**he mounting tensions with the government and the quantity and seniority of MB members arrested last week all indicate that this case will force a change in Amman's relations with the MB. The extent of the change will depend on several factors.

The MB is hoping that authorities will react mildly again. Accordingly, the group issued a statement on April 15 distancing itself from the arrested cell and describing it as "individual actions." Notably, however, the statement failed to condemn the perpetrators, instead tacitly legitimizing them as "supporting the resistance"—similar to the tone it struck following the October infiltration incident.

Yet this case is highly unlikely to pass without significant consequences. The sentiment among many Jordanian officials is that the previous lenient approach failed to change the MB's behavior, emboldening the group instead. Over the past few days, the government has heavily publicized the arrests in a well-coordinated media campaign. This high-profile approach, coupled with the tough tone heard in statements by government officials and parliamentarians—some of whom called for enforcing the ban (<https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2025/04/21/jordan-parliamentary-session-muslim-brotherhood-rocket-cell>) on the MB—signal that Amman will not simply climb down.

Beyond words, the severity of the government's reaction will depend on whether the investigation reveals more extensive MB organizational involvement and/or foreign connections. The balance of power within the Jordanian establishment will also shape the response, as will the MB's reactions. The fact that the Royal Court has not yet commented on the incident indicates that decisionmakers are still mulling their final course of action.

At one end of the spectrum, some are calling for a complete ban on the MB and IAF along with a crackdown on Brotherhood members. This step does not seem likely at the moment because it deviates from the traditional security approach of shying away from all-out confrontation if other options exist. It would also risk triggering instability given the MB's recent election victory, the powerful public anger over Gaza, and the ongoing economic hardship that many Jordanians are suffering. Yet such an approach cannot be ruled out if the MB decides to vigorously challenge the government's next moves.

A less severe approach could include any number of measured steps: curtailing the MB's power without completely outlawing it; enforcing the MB ban but allowing the IAF to continue operating; taking targeted action against specific MB members, particularly those close to Hamas and other external actors; tightening rules around public demonstrations and other forms of political expression (e.g., the electronic crimes law); and dissolving parliament while calling for new elections, whether under a new law or without the IAF's participation. Yet the latter option could represent a setback to the political modernization plan endorsed by the king.

## Implications for U.S. Policy

**J**ordan's latest internal security challenge is a reminder that despite major setbacks to Iran's proxies throughout the region, the "axis of resistance" remains potent and determined to undermine America's closest regional allies. Yet the arrests also indicate the strength of the kingdom's governance and security sectors, whose reputation

suffered after failing to predict the MB's electoral victory. Although Jordan's fundamental stability has not been shaken, the coming weeks will be delicate as the dust settles and the nature of the government response and MB reaction become clear.

Washington should keep a close eye on these developments and maintain robust communication with Amman about its intentions. The palace's reaction may include controversial steps toward the MB, especially if the group chooses to escalate. Ongoing bilateral communication will be key to avoid misunderstandings or conflicting U.S. messaging, while reaffirming Washington's support could send a useful signal to any regional actors seeking to exploit this unsettled moment.

In the longer term, the incident highlights the importance of further expanding U.S. foreign military financing and intelligence relations with Jordan. It also argues for clarifying future trade relations in a manner that serves the kingdom's economic interests while adhering to the Trump administration's tariff policies. Prime Minister Jafar Hassan's recent visit to Washington was an important first step on both counts—one that U.S. officials should build on sooner rather than later.

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