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Jordan's Shift Back to the Sunni-Israeli Coalition

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Brief Analysis

Despite recent tensions between Jordan and other stakeholders in the Middle East, shifting dynamics across the region have recently led to the formation of a tentative U.S.-backed cooperation between Israel and such Sunni Arab states as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and the Hashemite Kingdom. While this rapprochement may very well prove to be financially and politically beneficial to Jordan, it has nonetheless sparked the ire of many Jordanian citizens. So far, King Abdullah has resisted public pressure and has taken steps to further promote this rapprochement, a strategically wise decision.

The cooperation between the aforementioned partners is largely the result of two factors, the first of which is the threat posed by Iran and the Islamic State (IS): In a 2017 [interview](#) with the *Washington Post*, King Abdullah expressed his fears regarding Iran's growing influence in the region, stating "the Revolutionary Guard is about 70 kilometers away... If it is bad news for us, you have to put the Israeli equation into this." Indeed, concerns over Iran's and IS's expansionist intentions, as well as a desire to prevent Iran from achieving its nuclear aspirations, have led Israel and the aforementioned Sunni states to recognize that they have mutual interests and has opened the door for security collaboration.

The second factor prompting the formation of this surprising alliance is economic in nature. In recent years, the volume of trade and even joint projects between Israel and these Sunni Arab states has increased significantly. In 2014, for example, the Israeli company Delek Drilling signed a \$771 million agreement with Jordanian companies Arab Potash and Jordan Bromine. Two years later, the owners of the Israeli gas field Leviathan signed a \$10 billion agreement with the Jordan Electric Power Company.

However, when it comes to crucial topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the future of Jerusalem, and the war in Yemen, Jordan does not always see eye to eye with Israel, the United States, or its Sunni counterparts. For example, whereas Amman believes that addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict must remain the top priority, the other parties view Iranian expansion as a more pressing matter. Moreover, issues like the war in Yemen, which Jordan has been reluctant provide military support for, the boycott on Qatar, which Jordan opposes, and Jordan's purported soft

treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood have all strained the Saudi-Jordanian relationship. Of course, moving the United States Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem has done nothing to strengthen ties between Amman and Washington, while violence related to Israel's decision to install metal detectors outside of al-Aqsa Mosque in 2017 led to a temporary closure of the Israeli embassy in Jordan, though it has since reopened.

Nonetheless, despite pressure from civil society and some political institutions to pull out of the unofficial alliance, King Abdullah appears to realize that doing so may be dangerous and would likely hurt Jordan's long-term interests. Seeking to fortify the relationship with Israel and other Sunni states, King Abdullah received Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the latter's visit to Amman. The king has also recalled the Jordanian ambassador to Tehran with no intention of sending a replacement and sent Crown Prince Hussein to the United Arab Emirates to meet with his Emirati counterpart, Mohammed bin Zayed. Likewise, the king traveled to Washington, D.C. and participated in Saudi Arabia's Mecca Summit, where he was able to secure \$2.5 billion in aid.

The most serious challenge that the Jordanian monarch now faces is convincing the Jordanian public of the strategic benefits of a Sunni-Israeli alliance. The Jordanian public understands its decision-makers' limited capacity to influence current events, especially when it comes to Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The King should thus try to convince its subjects that Jordan's membership in the alliance enables it to fully participate in and preserve its historic role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, as well as protect Jordanian interests in Jerusalem. The public ought to understand as the King has that, as a small country with limited resources, Jordan depends on its allies—even if those allies can sometimes seem less than ideal. ❖



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