

JPS

Jordanian Politics & Society Magazine

SAMIR AL-RIFAI

Interview with JPS

HASAN AL-MOMANI

Jordanian Diplomacy and the War on
Gaza Amid Shifting Dynamics

NATHAN J. BROWN

Is the United States Coming or Going?

MURAD SHISHANI

The Security Landscape in the Middle
East Post-October 7th, 2023

**REGIONAL
IMPACT OF
THE WAR ON**

GAZA



Politics & Society
Institute



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Regional Impact of the War on Gaza



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Cover Photo: A view shows houses and buildings destroyed in Israeli strikes, in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip, October 11, 2023. (Reuters)

“ABOUT JPS

There is often a significant gap between political transformations, both domestic and international, and the knowledge produced by researchers, academics, and specialists regarding social issues and phenomena. Despite the proliferation of many journals in the human and social sciences, there is a shortage of publications that provide deep, research-based knowledge and perspectives, that offer valuable alternatives and recommendations to decision-makers across various policy dimensions.

The Jordanian Politics & Society Magazine (JPS), published periodically by the Politics and Society Institute, aims to fill this gap. JPS serves as a scientific platform dedicated to fostering rigorous intellectual debate on issues related to domestic and foreign policies at regional and international levels, with a particular focus on the Jordanian political landscape. The magazine emphasizes the development of scientific and intellectual concepts to address various real-world variables and promotes the exchange of ideas and interactive efforts among specialists.

Note

The views and opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of neither PSI nor the Editors.

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FOREWORD

Foreword

I did not hesitate to accept the position of Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Jordanian Politics and Society Magazine when Dr. Mohammed Abu Rumman invited me to it. This decision aligns with my long-held belief that there is, unfortunately, a deep-rooted gap between decision-making processes in the Arab world and scientific research. This research is supposed to support decision-makers and political elites by providing in-depth analyses, methodical interpretations of events and developments, and feedback on policies. Such support helps decision-makers in any country understand where to tread carefully, rather than walking in the dark without any long-term strategic vision or thorough study of the various dimensions and aspects of the issues they are dealing with.

We are still discussing in the Arab and Islamic world today the importance of having think tanks and research centers.

Let us admit that a significant portion of officials and decision-makers in the Arab world lack awareness, to the point of ignorance, about this necessity. Conversely, these centers and the journals and publications they produce have become an integral part of the policy-making process. They contribute to the development of options and visions that decision-makers and politicians rely on to determine their positions and directions. These centers provide them with data, analyses, and insights, enabling them to understand events swiftly and to present rational and realistic alternatives.

Furthermore, the role of think tanks has surpassed the indirect role in the process of «policy-making» and has become more direct and informal. These institutions had provided side spaces for dialogue and discussion between countries and nations on policies, known as «Track II» diplomacy, which serves as a prelude

and an outlet for many governments to address various conflicts and issues. These think tanks offer environments that integrate technocratic expertise with knowledge and political realism. Consequently, we observe greater interest today from lobbying groups in many countries toward influential think tanks. These groups attempt to influence them to provide recommendations and ideas that align with their interests or those of the governments they network with. This reflects the increasing and evolving role of these think tanks in political arenas and in shaping public policies in many of the world's developed countries today.

What we aspire to achieve with the Jordanian Politics and Society Magazine, along with colleagues on the advisory and editorial boards, is for this young, new journal to be a step towards developing the public policy-making process and enlightening politicians from various political backgrounds. This would enable the interpretation of the political, economic, and social landscape, the development of public debate in the country, and the rationalization of

discussions on important issues that affect national security, national interests, internal reform policies, and many other topics.

In the first issue, between your hands, of the magazine, it was agreed to focus on the brutal war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, highlighting the enormous humanitarian disasters it has caused. The issue also reveals the strategic weakness of the Arab situation in facing such a challenge and the winds of change it brings to the region. These changes will affect regional policies, alliances, opposing camps, and each party's attempts to build its narrative and participate in the new regional system. It will also address the process of role distribution according to the balance of power and the cards held by the players.

It was therefore necessary to engage with this central and critical issue, especially regarding its impact on Jordanian foreign and domestic policies. We aimed to explore the various dimensions, implications, and consequences of this significant event and what might follow. I enjoyed reading the

analyses, articles, and reviews included in the issue by a distinguished group of Western, Arab, and Jordanian researchers and intellectuals. These contributions cover American and Western policies, regional policies, and issues related to Jordan's strategic interests.

I thank the Politics and Society Institute and the magazine team for this important and exceptional effort. I urge them to continue, develop, and advance along this path so that this magazine becomes, in the

near future, an intellectual reference for policy planning, understanding events, and interpreting changes just as we currently refer to magazines like Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, and publications from important research institutions worldwide.

Abdul Karim Al-Kabariti,
Chairman of the Advisory Committee of
JPS
Former Prime Minister of Jordan

EDITORS Preface

Why the Jordanian Politics and Society Magazine (JPS)?

The concept of this periodically magazine, characterized by its intellectual and strategic focus, was a significant aspiration for the Politics and Society Institute's administration. However, the lack of financial resources prevented its realization, despite our complete conviction of the importance of this magazine. In fact, it is considered an urgent necessity for the role of scientific research in enlightening and developing the understanding of decision-making institutions in Jordan, as well as various political actors. This magazine aims to shed light on the developments and transformations in the surrounding environment, whether they are external (international and regional) or internal, and whether they are political, economic, or social.

It is unfortunate that we can find only a very

limited number (at best) of serious scientific and intellectual journals dedicated to Jordanian policies. Many academic journals in Jordanian universities are far removed from real problems, issues, challenges, and priorities. Therefore, we felt it was important to take the first step in establishing this magazine and do whatever it requires to publish a periodical that provides a scientific analysis of Jordanian politics. Our goal is to build a framework for understanding current events and to broaden the perspective in the political decision-making process.

Despite its relatively short existence, as it has not yet reached its fourth year, PSI has quickly and strongly established its reputation as one of the most important think tanks in Jordan. This reputation has been built through the workshops,

meetings, papers, and studies the institute produces in analyzing both domestic and foreign policies, as well as its participation in many international seminars, conferences, and regional and international research networks. The institute has also been a leader in what is known as the "track II diplomacy" in Jordanian-Palestinian relations and has engaged in intellectual and political discussions with many research centers and regional study groups.

All these activities are part of the institute's strategic vision to be the leading think tank at the local level and one of the strongest at the regional level. PSI aims to provide Jordanian decision-makers with analyses, data, and recommendations based on scientific research, strategic thinking, and well-developed theories in key areas such as Jordanian national interest, national security, public policies, democratic transition, political parties, sustainable development, and many other issues. The institute and its family members actively and seriously engage in these areas to ensure that the work of PSI is useful, beneficial, and of high quality.

To achieve this goal, the Institute's Board of Trustees has provided the essential financial support needed to launch this magazine,

aiming for it to be a pioneer in this field. However, the financial requirements are still insufficient and need further support to ensure this work continues, flourishes, and becomes a significant landmark in the Jordanian political and research arena. The magazine is also honored to have within its Advisory Board a distinguished group of intellectuals, researchers, and university professors, led by the esteemed former Prime Minister, Abdul Karim al-Kabariti, who has graciously agreed to sponsor and support this effort in every possible way.

The inaugural "pilot" issue of the Jordanian Politics and Society Magazine is published as the Israeli forces wage a war on Gaza strip. This timing coincided with various decision-making and analytical centers in the West and the region analyzing the strategic dimensions of the war and outlining potential contours of its aftermath. Hence, the first issue's focus is on attempting to explore the strategic dimensions of the war and its various and multiple effects on Jordanian national security, strategic interests, domestic and foreign policies.

The issue includes a collection of key analyses and articles, beginning with a special interview with former Prime Minister, senator Samir Al-

Rifai, head of the Royal Committee to Modernise Political System. The interview covers a range of important topics, including an analysis and assessment of Jordanian diplomacy during the war on Gaza, the objectives Jordan pursued in its foreign policy, and the success of Jordanian diplomacy in achieving these goals. Al-Rifai emphasizes maintaining a delicate balance through positive and strong relationships with all parties and adhering to a rational, moderate, and realistic approach in managing state affairs .

Regarding the internal equation and the potential impact of the war on Gaza on the political reform and modernization process, Al-Rifai dismisses such concerns. He believes that holding parliamentary elections and the signals from the King affirm the commitment to this political path.

Regarding Jordanian foreign policy and the war on Gaza, the issue features two articles with differing perspectives. The first article, by Dr. Hassan Al-Momani, Dean of the Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II School of International Studies, analyzes the determinants of Jordanian foreign policy during the war on Gaza. He emphasizes the importance of Jordan being able to manage its regional relationships in a

way that serves its strategic interests with all parties. While acknowledging the significance of public opinion in the policy-making process, he advocates for a realistic and rational approach to handling the Palestinian cause and cautions against raising expectations about Jordan's capabilities. Al-Momani disagrees with analyses predicting a future Jordanian-Israeli conflict, arguing that Israel's deep state, which recognizes Jordan's strategic importance, will work to avoid any confrontation and maintain strategic and security relations with Jordan.

On the other hand, Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman, an academic advisor at PSI and a professor of political science at the University of Jordan, discusses the issue of Jordanian national security and the Palestinian cause. He analyzes the main trends among the political elite close to decision-making regarding Jordanian-Palestinian relations. He categorizes these trends into the traditional conservative faction, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining a degree of realism, rationality, and a strategic relationship with Israel, and the new right-wing faction, which reflects internal Jordanian concerns about the country's stance on the Palestinian cause and seeks complete disengagement from the Palestinian affairs.

Additionally, there is an emerging trend among political elites within and around decision-making circles that does not offer a comprehensive approach but highlights the importance of reviewing the structural transformations occurring today in Israel moving beyond the traditional perspective, which fails to recognize the magnitude of strategic shifts and demographic and cultural changes happening in Israel in recent years, eroding the realistic possibility of establishing a Palestinian state that meets the minimum demands of the Palestinians.

In his article, Abu Rumman contends that there are new and serious challenges to Jordanian national security and vital interests linked to developments in Palestine. These challenges impact many national issues, necessitating the development of a new national theory, strengthening relations with Palestinians, and crafting a new approach with more effective Jordanian interventions, particularly in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

In a related context, analyzing the repercussions of the Israeli war on Gaza on Jordanian policies, Dr. Ibrahim Seif, former Minister of Energy, Industry and Trade, and the Jordanian economic expert, believes that this year's budget was based on the

assumption that growth in GDP would be 2.8%. However, the continuation of the war in Gaza has negatively impacted the Jordanian economy, particularly the tourism sector, which constituted 13.8% of GDP in 2023. Dr. Seif also addressed the impact of boycotting Western products and services produced in countries with ties to Israel on declining consumption. Additionally, the state of uncertainty in the region, particularly in the private sector, has affected domestic and foreign investments through the postponement or cancellation of many investments.

Dr. Seif concludes his article by stating that the general financial challenges in 2024 and beyond will exacerbate. He anticipates that the government will resort to further borrowing, work on improving the efficiency of public spending, and incentivize the private sector to partner with the government in order to avoid economic slowdown. Dr. Ibrahim Seif believes that Jordan is now more than ever required to pursue its own reform agenda, focusing on areas with economic and social impacts.

On the level of understanding the strategic shifts happening in Israel, Hassan Al-Barari, professor of international relations at the University of Jordan and Qatar University, writes an article

about the impact of the war on Israeli domestic policies and the divisions within Israel, which he expects will soon reach the level of clash and the disintegration of the current ruling coalition in Israel, leading to the emergence of a new, more center-right government.

In the same context, Mirna Al-Sarhan, research assistant at PSI, monitors and analyzes what think tanks in Israel produce regarding Jordan and Jordan's policy toward Israel. The report notes that Jordan's role in the war on Gaza is viewed as secondary, not primary or influential. Al-Sarhan also observes that there is limited material and analysis related to Jordan in these centers, but most focus on the necessity of maintaining strategic relations with Jordan and not undermining them, as well as the importance of political stability in Jordan.

On the level of Palestinian policies, the article by Dr. Ahmed Jamil Azem, professor of political science at Birzeit and Qatar Universities, comes to analyze the strategic developments and implications of the war on Gaza on the Palestinian cause. Azem views that the foundation of the struggle is that "the rifle plants and politics reap", but the Palestinian case is different, witnessing a state of tangible political impotence. While Fatah suffers from many problems and the

Palestinian Authority faces a dead end in its project and political bets, Hamas also will not succeed in becoming an internationally and Arab-accepted alternative, nor even a significant player in the Palestinian scene. The problem, according to Azem, lies in the "zero-sum" logic between the Palestinian factions, which makes the relationship between them marred by a lack of trust and an inability to reach a consensual national project that prioritizes the supreme interests of the Palestinian people today.

Moving from the Palestinian-Israeli-Jordanian contexts, Dr. Firas Elias, professor of political science and a political researcher, provides a framing of the Turkish and Iranian positions during the war on Gaza, while Syrian researcher Fadil Hanci offers an analysis of the Syrian warring factions' adaptation to the implications of the war on Gaza.

On the global level, Dr. Nathan Brown, professor of political science, contributes to this issue through an analytical article on U.S. policies in the Middle East in the upcoming phase. After analyzing the international, regional, and domestic American contexts that framed the Biden administration's stance, Brown expects the U.S. administration to move away from

military action and hegemonic-strategies in the next phase and invest more in limited, soft diplomacy, aiming to maintain solid American interests in the region.

Murad Batal Shishani, Founder of “Remarks on Political Violence” group, analyzes the security dimensions and repercussions that may be reflected in the region due to the war on Gaza. He concludes that the next phase will witness a reinforcement of the jihadist groups’ narrative and their ability to employ current events to create a new wave of radicalization and recruit many Arab and Muslim youth on this basis.

As the war on Gaza is fraught with discussions about international and regional conspiracies, which take a central place in Arab culture, Abrar Al-Obwini, a research assistant at the Politics and Society Institute, reviews the book "The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories" by Jan-Willem van Prooijen, a renowned behavioral psychologist. The book provides a theoretical analysis of the extent to which conspiracy theories influence individuals’ lives and choices, and how they have led to the emergence of different ideologies and populist currents that have shown their influence in the political sphere. Therefore, van Prooijen sees the importance

of studying conspiracy theories seriously, even if we reject them, as they have become a societal phenomenon that controls minds. The significance of this book is not to explain the validity of these theories or not, but rather to understand, study, and analyze the personal traits of those who believe in them and those who do not through a series of discussions between van Prooijen and a group of researchers in the psychology of conspiracy theories.

We hope that this issue will be a launching pad for a solid Jordanian intellectual and consultative scientific effort in understanding and analyzing Jordanian policies. I cannot but extend my sincere gratitude to the Editorial Secretary, Abdullah Al-Taie, and the magazine’s editor and translator, Ala’ Aqel, for their extraordinary and amazing efforts over the past months to produce this issue, which required back-breaking work for long hours, connecting day and night to meet the challenge. I also thank Heba Ra’i, the technical supervisor of JPS, the institute’s executive director, Rasha Fityan, and the entire PSI family, who work diligently and with dedication, under intense pressure to meet the short timeframes and deadlines.

JPS interview

JPS interview

In light of the severe events that the Gaza Strip has been experiencing for more than six months since the start of Israeli military operations on the territory, and the serious security incidents occurring in the West Bank characterized by harassment of Palestinians and the expansion of settlements, with the continuous Western and American support for Tel Aviv, and the ongoing failure to reach a settlement or truce, there has been unprecedented official Jordanian escalation in the past two decades, led personally by King Abdullah II. He has opposed the Israeli right-wing and described Israel's actions as "genocide," alongside efforts led by the Kingdom's Foreign Minister, Ayman Safadi, amidst the escalating tension in Jordanian-Israeli relations. This raises numerous questions about the stance of Jordan's foreign policy and the challenges in the coming phase, both externally and internally.



Against this backdrop, the The Jordanian Politics and Society Magazine through its editor-in-chief, Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman, interviewed former Prime Minister Samir Al-Rifai, the head of the Royal Committee for the Modernization of the Political System.

The interview took place on April 15, 2024.



JPS

Regarding the repercussions of the Iranian strike on Israel, do you think it will impact the future of the war on Gaza? Should we view it positively or negatively? Later, we will ask about Jordan's stance on this strike and how it has calculated its position.

Al-Rifai:

When discussing specific events, we must consider them within a broader context. The broader context of the Palestinian issue involves ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a fully sovereign Palestinian state west of the Jordan River. The events following

October 7 and the Israeli reaction over the past six months, coupled with the extremist right-wing decisions of Netanyahu's government, the massacres, destruction, killings, and famines being committed are what King Abdullah II has been focusing on, along with Jordan's position in the last six months. This also includes continuous support for the two-state solution, a vision crafted decades ago and one that will persist until it becomes a reality on the ground.

Globally, there is also a shift in public sentiment towards Israel as the true face of its government and the extremist Israeli right-



I believe that serving the Palestinian cause involves continuing to pressure the current Israeli government to open the crossings and end the occupation. Anything else that creates additional conflict does not benefit Palestinians or the region as a whole

wing has been exposed. It has become evident that there is no real intention for peace or for establishing a Palestinian state. The Israeli government has shown no problem with the destruction, killing, and exploiting the war

to ensure its contentious grip on power. When the pressure of the battles in Gaza increased and those close to Israel began pressuring Israel internally to change its political image and open the crossings and borders, the Israeli government responded with continuous provocations to distract from Gaza's suffering. Striking the Iranian consulate in Damascus is part of this provocation. The Iranian response was a reaction to this Israeli provocation, not because of the more than 33,000 Palestinian victims in Gaza and the ongoing suffering there for over six months.

So, when we evaluate these events, we must ask: Is it in the Palestinians' interest to shift focus away from Gaza and open another front for killing and civilian harm while the world is preoccupied with other issues? From the first day of the war, King Abdullah II warned about the dangers of expanding the conflict, which is precisely what the Israeli right-wing government is doing. I believe the Iranian strike was a response to the attack on their consulate in Damascus and the violation of Iranian sovereignty. But did the Iranian response serve the Palestinian cause?

I believe that serving the Palestinian cause involves continuing to pressure the current Israeli government to open the crossings and end the occupation. Anything else that creates additional conflict does not benefit Palestinians or the region as a whole. The more the region becomes inflamed, the more its people suffer, especially with power brokers using the conflict to increase their interests rather than seeking a real solution that benefits the countries and peoples of the region.

JPS:

Can we say that alongside this interpretation, there is another perspective that suggests Iran's involvement in the war, even if symbolic, might reshape the regional balance of power? This could draw attention to the fact that Israel is not alone in dealing with Gaza, but there is a regional axis creating a balance of power with Israel.

Al-Rifai:

I would have understood this perspective if something had happened at the beginning of the war in Gaza. If Iran and its militias in all the countries where they are present had launched an attack on Israel to protect Gaza and acted on their belief that the State of Israel should not exist, then the Iranian arms could have moved under the notion of: "We do not accept what is happening in Gaza and have decided to enter this battle." This could be depicted in the northern borders with Lebanon and Yemen. However, the results of escalation on those two fronts affected the region directly, not Israel in the end. Iran did not escalate recently with drones and missiles until after its consulate in Damascus was targeted and seven prominent Revolutionary Guard officers were killed.

So, I believe portraying the Iranian attack as being for Gaza is far from the truth. Today, there are options indicating a possibility of delaying intervention for a year through diplomatic pressure and defense to protect the Palestinian people. There is another side that believes Israel should be wiped off the map, but those who believe this do not do anything practical to actualize this idea. Even when movements are made in this direction, they are for personal interests according to their interpretation of the scene.

I believe that the Israeli government that refused to comply with the world decisions and Security Council resolutions drew attention which put pressure on it by the international community and raised the voices to stop this war and destruction and provide a better life for the Palestinians. Today, we have been given new momentum as countries claim to stand with Palestine. However, when Israel is at risk, the global community stands with Israel without limits. Now for the first time, people see that Israel is not a victim; it has returned to square one, playing the victim card after the Iranian strike.

I think efforts should not focus on the fact

that what is happening in Palestine and Gaza of killing and starvation is an unsolvable problem. If we say the solution is military intervention, the international community will militarily support Israel. Today, diplomatic pressure and not expanding the scope of the battle is the solution, especially since any expansion will cost Arab citizens, particularly Palestinians, greatly.

JPS:

We want an analysis of the regional situation and Jordan's position in the war on Gaza, and its implications on the regional and Jordanian stance. The question is: there is currently a divergence of views within political circles.

Some believe that Jordan has taken the necessary stance in defending our Palestinian brothers in Gaza and has taken far-reaching



diplomatic positions, entering the battle significantly. Others warn and fear that we do not want to lose our regional position due to inaccurate calculations, especially since there are clear regional arrangements in the upcoming phase, which are at the expense of those considered losers in the current scenario. The main question is, in your estimation, how do you evaluate the Jordanian position? What are the criteria that have led us to this stage? And what points should we address in the upcoming phase?

Al-Rifai:

Firstly, differences of opinion, even on the Jordanian street, are healthy. On the contrary, we want Jordan to be an open country that allows diverse opinions and provides space for freedom of expression. As long as this expression does not insult, undermine, or harm the interests of the Jordanian state, it is desirable and positive. When the Palestinian side signed the Oslo Accords with Israel, Jordan then moved towards the Wadi Araba Agreement. There was a vision that if the stakeholders decided that peace and treaties were the best way to achieve a Palestinian state, we entered into the Wadi Araba

Agreement, which redefined our shared borders, except for the unmarked section between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Therefore, Jordan today is investing in the Wadi Araba Agreement and its relations with Israel for the sake of Palestine. When Jordan sends aid to our people in Gaza, it would not have been possible without a peace agreement and coordination with the Israeli side. When the King constantly speaks about the continuous provocative attempts by the Israelis in the West Bank, we always revert to diplomacy as a pressure tool to achieve calm and stop provocations. When we support the Jordanian Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem, back the Palestinian leadership, and speak out in various forums, the world today wants peace.



Sometimes populist decisions do not address the current feelings of the people, but if one only follows their emotions, they might unintentionally harm their national interests in the same way they try to solve others' problems, paying a heavy price and returning to point zero or below.

Thus, the Jordanian position has not changed since we decided this is the only path. After Jordan sacrificed much of its resources and martyrs defending Palestine, our position remains unchanged today. Jordan supports the Palestine Liberation Organization, which is the sole representative of the Palestinian people, and says, "We still believe in peace and want to move towards it." Therefore, Jordan, like many countries in the world, supports achieving this peace. In Gaza, there has been a feeling that the resistance can solve the Palestinian issue differently. There was a sense of exhilaration that a group could take a thousand hostages and make the Israeli army and the Israeli state pay the price for that.

More than six months have passed, and we are witnessing massacres, and no one is willing to do anything except exert pressure and send aid, putting the right-wing Israeli government in a position no Israeli government has been in before. I believe today the winners are those who achieve a Palestinian state and a two-state solution in the end, with Western support for Gaza, the ability to rebuild the sector, and pressure through all diplomatic relations to achieve this.

When anyone sees what is happening in Gaza, they sometimes think with emotion, but in politics, sometimes the politician must put their emotions in the "freezer" and think with their mind. What do we ultimately want? Sometimes populist decisions addresses the current feelings of the people, if one was only driven by their emotions, they might unintentionally harm their national interests in the same way they try to solve others' problems, paying a heavy price and returning to point zero or below.

Therefore, the ethical, principled, and humanitarian stance, along with the higher interests of the state, which include the state's responsibility to protect itself not only for today but for tomorrow and the next hundred years, dictate that Jordan maintains a consistent position through all stages, whether with Europeans, Americans, or everyone. Jordan's position with Palestine is humanitarian, based on principles, and sometimes Jordan bears more than it can handle. However, Jordan avoids scenarios of other countries that have paid the price for wrong decisions. Certainly, with all these positions, we often need to take two steps forward and one step back, three

steps forward and one step back, to avoid losing the strategic goal, which is preserving Jordan, strengthening the internal situation, improving the economic situation, creating opportunities for Jordanian youth, and at the same time helping our brothers in Palestine to ultimately achieve an independent Palestinian state.

JPS :

To what extent do you see the Jordanian position aligning with the idea of supreme national interests regarding Gaza specifically? What are the main considerations in the decision-making process by the political hall that shaped this Jordanian stance, in your opinion? Were all factors well-studied, or do you think some elements deviated from the required path?

Al-Rifai:

I believe when looking at positions, there were different stances from various entities. Overall, the position adhered to our constants at times, and this is my personal opinion. It's possible that emotions played a more significant role, especially given the state of war, which makes it challenging to see clearly and sometimes leads to forgetting strategic

dimensions and objectives. I think some people were driven by emotion because, ultimately, Jordan's strength lies in its ability to speak to everyone and not be isolated, which allows it to support its Arab brothers. If the Jordanian stance had been based primarily on emotion, King Abdullah's ability to convince the Western world to open the crossings, pressure the Israeli government, and speak on various platforms would have been less effective.



parties should continue to send positive messages to all sides, messages of good intentions. The idea of playing the victim or being targeted is not true

We must always focus on our strategic goal because the worst thing for any state is to let strategy degrade into mere tactics, and tactics degrade into mere "making do", thus losing sight of the strategic objective. Thankfully, despite everything that is happening, we were able to highlight what is happening in Gaza, the reality of the Palestinian cause, and the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Today, the more transparency there is, the

clearer and better the discussion about what we want becomes, and it helps define what Jordanian national interests are and what genuinely benefits us. For example, the issue of popular boycotts of Western products or those supporting Israel generally – many officials hesitate to speak frankly to citizens due to fear. When we boycott a company, someone might say this company lost a huge amount, impacting its parent company significantly. But the truth is, when about 5,000 students have to withdraw from universities because salaries are unavailable, the loss to Jordanian youth is immense. This means we must increase national aid by a certain amount, costing every Jordanian millions of dinars. So, when water or electricity bills increase significantly, it's due to certain decisions made with specific impacts. I think when Jordanian citizens lack information, it creates a state of incapacity. We do not live what the people of Gaza are experiencing with killing and destruction, and we cannot feel what their children are going through. Just recently, when some explosions occurred in Jordanian airspace due to the air force's concern for Jordanians, many who previously called for resistance to continue its battle started saying, "God forbid!" upon seeing what war means. Therefore, we must always look out for the

nation's interest and strengthen the internal front. I believe the foundation is to be honest and bold with the citizens.

JPS

If we try to analyze Jordan's foreign policy by looking at the considerations regarding national interests in the issue of Gaza, how would you rank the priorities in Jordanian diplomacy and pressure positions? For instance, is the priority (displacement and fear of exile) based on the presence of intentions in this regard, and taking firm stances to prevent it? Or is the second priority (the internal front and concern about what's happening in Gaza impacting Jordan's internal front, especially with its demographic and social dimensions)? Or the third priority (the populist aspect), which is not wrong if it's well-studied, meaning the state engages in political marketing on a popular level, especially if there's no strategic cost to this populist stance? Or the fourth priority (the stance towards the right-wing Israeli government and Benjamin Netanyahu, and the crisis over the past years between Jordan and this government)? How would you rank these considerations?

Al-Rifai:

In my opinion, the Jordanian priorities in order are:

Fortifying Jordan: The primary priority is to fortify Jordan, ensuring it remains based on moderation, peace, and positive relations with everyone. This priority has numerous economic implications, such as for Jordanians working abroad and economic interests.

Fortifying the internal front with complete transparency: This is crucial for any situation or issue where a decision needs to be made. Citizens should feel that decisions are made rationally and not emotionally, for the protection of Jordan.

Continuing openness and Jordan's pivotal role with the West: Ultimately, our strength lies in our ability to exert pressure. Many capitals request visits from King Abdullah, rather than the other way around, which is an opportunity many resource-rich countries do not have.

Ending the occupation: It is essential to dispel the notion that every ten years the issue of displacement arises. In my opinion, there



is no real danger of displacement, but some members of the extreme right-wing Israeli government wish to solve the Palestinian issue by making the Palestinian people disappear or displacing them in other countries. This is evident in the Gaza war, where the Israeli army pressures the people of Gaza towards the south to push them out. However, the civilians of the strip continuously try to return to northern Gaza. As for the neighboring countries around Palestine, most of them are collapsing and lack institutions. Therefore, the stronger you are, and the more robust your institutions and status, the more protected you are from any extremist discourse that may arise.

Each of these priorities reflects a strategic approach to maintaining Jordan's stability, strength, and role in the region while supporting the Palestinian cause in a balanced and effective manner.



Fourth, parties should continue to send positive messages to all sides, messages of good intentions. The idea of playing the victim or being targeted is not true

JPS :

There are two theories present in Jordanian decision-making circles. The first one posits that we are witnessing a major shift in the Israeli side, and today's discussion about the future of Jordanian-Israeli relations is more about crisis management than conflict resolution. The second theory argues that Jordan must maintain contact and communication with Israeli authorities, whether within Israel's deep state or its political leadership, as exterminating this scenario and options in Jordan would be a mistake. Which theory do you support?

Al-Rifai:

I will refer back to King Hussein's stance—may he rest in peace. In the first incident, the attempt on Khaled Mashal's life put the peace agreement on the line because the attack represented a violation of Jordanian sovereignty. If Jordanian sovereignty is violated, everything, including the peace agreement, is on the table. In the second incident, after the killing of Israeli schoolgirls by a Jordanian soldier in March 1997, King Hussein visited the homes of the victims' families to offer his condolences. This act was meant to highlight the human side of each of us, but of course, there was also a political aspect. If you are influential within Israel, you can impact their policy. Today, we see external influences on Israeli policy, and therefore, we have the right to influence within Israel. The more we can enter the circle of influence, the stronger we become. While we still believe in peace, and a two-state solution, and seeing the Palestinian flag west of the Jordan River, I support the idea of maintaining pressure in all directions, whether inside or outside Israel, to achieve the goal of peace. The Israeli right will not be comfortable with closing the door and not dealing with us. Therefore, we must not fall into the traps set by the Israeli right or divert global attention and pressure from them. We must deal with them as they deal with us and

the world. I believe that, for the first time, there is an Arab, particularly Jordanian, ability to speak to the West differently. We used to say that Israel had the ear of all capitals, and thankfully, Jordan now has the same. Our policy is based on a strategy and a method to achieve our goals, and this goal must be built on a careful study of where we are going and how we will get there, ensuring this path aligns with our principles. At the same time, if we want to go right or left, we need to know that we must return and not stay in the same direction.

JPS:

We are now facing a significant possibility of the return of the Republican administration. Some describe this as a nightmare for Jordanian policy, as during President Trump's term, Jordan was under severe pressure, the embassy was moved to Jerusalem, and the Deal of the Century was proposed. Now, we have two theories within Jordanian political circles regarding the possible return of the Trump administration and the resumption of the Deal of the Century and regional peace and normalization agreements, even if Trump does not return. This could be a new and growing regional dynamic. The first theory states that Jordan should stick to its positions and remain

opposed to the Deal of the Century as long as it does not offer comprehensive solutions to the Palestinian issue in its historically known sense and does not support the current regional normalization projects. The second theory sees this as a big mistake because it would diminish Jordan's regional role and harm its political, economic, and strategic interests, especially since many Arab countries have decided to proceed with this project. Which direction do you lean towards?

Al-Rifai:

It is difficult to predict. If the Biden administration continues, it is clear that the stance on China and Iran will not change, and there will be no major European problem. The current American policy will continue. Now, how capable is this Democratic administration of pressuring Netanyahu after the end of the Gaza war, especially when discussing a two-state solution?"Will an Israeli leader be ready to talk about a two-state solution after what has happened?" It might be easier to predict the American stance, but predicting the Israeli reaction is more challenging, even though Netanyahu's popularity is at its lowest among Israelis right now.



As for Trump's potential return and the scenario of his 2016 administration continuing in 2024, it is known that Trump is unpredictable. Will the Arab countries that normalized their relations with Israel keep their requests the same, or have they changed in 2024? For some countries, Palestine has returned as a central issue. Will Trump focus on China more than the Middle East? Will he focus on ending the war? " Many questions arise, and there is no need to fear them. However, there is an urgent need to be prepared and ready for options and scenarios

to make them compatible with Jordanian, Palestinian, and regional interests".

We do still have major problems in the region today. Iraq remains an issue for the United States, with 2,500 American soldiers there. What will be Trump's stance on withdrawing from Iraq or increasing American troops there? Will Iraq be completely stable? Will Iranian influence end there or not? What about Trump's position on Iran and Russia in Syria, Hezbollah, and the situation in Lebanon? There are many unresolved issues.

The only stable factor in the region is Jordan, which can play roles in many of these files. I do not think the issue today is returning to the Deal of the Century, as it will change entirely with Trump's priorities. The question is whether Trump wants to be the American president who achieves peace during his term and makes the world more stable, not just focusing on economic issues in specific countries. Jordan must be ready to invest in the respect it has from both Democrats and Republicans and exert pressure in all directions to know that there are options and visions available to Jordan and the region and not just be on the receiving end.

JPS :

The region is currently in a transitional phase with Iranian influence, Arab and Israeli actors, and regional chaos, except for Jordan. Given the lack of clarity in American and international policy, based on your experience and knowledge of foreign policy, what is the most likely scenario for the region in the coming phase, considering Iranian influence and regional conflicts? Specifically, as Iran sends a clear message to Israel, how do you foresee the Middle East in the next phase:

A- Do you expect a balance of power between the Iranian axis and other regional axes?

B- Or a regional conflict due to the inability to build understanding between Iran, America, and other countries?

C- Or the formation of a regional alliance against the existing Iranian alliance?

Al-Rifai:

The future largely depends on the American administration. If the Biden administration continues for another term, I believe the first scenario is the most likely: a balance of power between the Iranian axis and other regional axes. I don't think there will be a major regional confrontation because Iran doesn't want it, Israel as a state doesn't want it, and neither do the Arab actors. Netanyahu may want a regional war, but Israel and the Arab world do not. If Trump returns, in my opinion, all states will be wary of his moves. For example, Iran knew Obama's response when he drew a line, but Trump can go in all or any direction—he can make peace with North Korea and at the same time strike it. Therefore, I think all parties will be very cautious.

In the region, if Trump returns, it's not about allying, but America's weight and influence will be greater than in the current situation, especially as some countries believe they can deal with China and Russia without paying the price today. But I believe Trump will end the war in Ukraine with Russia and focus solely on China. In the Arab world, which has built its interests—for instance, in 2016, Syria was not part of the Arab League, unlike today where there is almost unanimous agreement except for one or two Arab countries. What will be his stance on Syria? Will he trim Iran's nails and its current influence?

There is a problem today between the Democrats, the Russians, and the Iranians. I think options should be available among these countries, especially Iran, so it does not remain in a position of creating problems for its neighbors due to its internal issues or other reasons.

JPS :

You are the head of the Committee to Modernize the Political System. Do you believe the war in Gaza will impact the political modernization project in Jordan?

Al-Rifai:

No, I don't believe it will. If it does, it would be merely used by some political forces, not by the state. For the state, the modernization project is a vision that King Abdullah II has had since the beginning of his reign. When he told us he wanted a ten-year program and programmatic parties within parliament, this has not changed. I know politics is about convincing people, even emotionally, but what has changed is convincing them emotionally without having a real program that can improve the situation of Jordanians. This will be short-term. The state continues to move forward. My message to political forces is not to exploit external situations to cast doubt on each other's positions. We should not use this opportunity as a substitute for having real political programs for parties, meaning no slogans as substitutes for real programs.

JPS :

The Islamic Action Front is the largest political opposition party in the country. If there were three points we could direct to this party, as it lies between political Islam, national opposition, and internal and external considerations, creating a



complex situation. Given your insight into the decision-making process, what would be the message for the party in the upcoming phase after modernization, to reduce the crisis between it and the state, a crisis which has persisted for some time?

Al-Rifai:

We were together in the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System, and there were three representatives from the Islamic Action Front. If King Abdullah had considered the Front to be an undesirable party, he wouldn't have appointed them to the committee!

I always remind them, first of all, not to call

themselves an opposition party. They are a licensed party under the constitution, so they are not an opposition party but oppose certain government policies. This is my continuous advice to them: to stop portraying themselves as an opposition party.

Second, all parties today have the opportunity to start their work on a solid foundation, especially since the next ten years are a foundation to reach the stage of forming programmatic parliamentary governments, as King Abdullah discussed in his discussion papers. To reach these party governments, we need

shadow governments in the parliament. Each party should have someone who can debate the finance minister on the current budget, for example, and discuss priorities with the water minister, the energy minister, and so on. This is my advice to all parties: the upcoming phase requires us to bring in experts who can fulfill their promises to their voters and move away from slogans, focusing on discussing the real issues of Jordanians, which can be identified through opinion polls and other means.

Third, it is not necessarily true that those who support this party are not Jordanians. They are Jordanians, so party foundations should be purely local and national, seeking only national considerations. Not everything the government does is wrong, and not everything other entities do is right. This creates confusion. For example, during a national occasion, the party might not discuss the occasion but talk about something unrelated to Jordan. People might ask, where exactly does this party stand? Some people have the impression that whenever the government makes a

mistake, it is seen as something positive for them. The party needs to have a good list of candidates and a convincing program, not based on wishful thinking. They can use government statistics; today, we have a debt of 60 billion, about 100% of the budget, and we pay around 3 billion in interest. Let them take these numbers and find solutions.

Fourth, parties should continue to send positive messages to all sides, messages of good intentions. The idea of playing the victim or being targeted is not true. I remember in the Royal Committee to Modernize the Political System that some clauses were not unanimously agreed upon but were included because certain currents wanted them, indicating that no one was excluded. Thus, no political component is targeted. If the opposite were true, they wouldn't have been members of the Royal Committee. The most important thing for any party is that its program, funding, goals, and loyalty are national, and it should not raise a flag above the Jordanian flag.

JPS :

Some parties are concerned others are ambitious that there might be a party-led government after the upcoming elections. Is this scenario likely? And is it in favor of the parties or not?

Al-Rifai:

Firstly, the committee worked on creating programmatic parliamentary parties and did not talk about forming a government. The quicker we rush to form party-led governments, where the entire government is partisan, the more we risk undermining the idea. The idea was to start with 30%, then move to 50%, and finally to 65%. When the Islamic Action Front requested allocating 30% of the seats to parties, we then recommended 50% and 65%. King Abdullah said he wants the majority of the parliament to be composed of parties within ten years. So, I went to the King and informed him of the 30%, then 50%, then 65%, including the Islamic Action Front's suggestion that it is difficult to recommend this by law. They were the most stringent on this matter. The King told me that if we could establish the law at 30% and recommend it, then the 50% and 65% phases would naturally follow. He was ahead of everyone in his proposal. However, if a party now expresses its desire for its secretary-general to become the prime minister or

a minister, we would be undermining the whole idea. If we create small parties just to represent an individual, we would also be undermining the idea. The gradual approach today means starting with 30%, then moving to 50%, and then 65%. This means that MPs should work as shadow governments until the King is convinced that the time has come for parties to form the government. Ultimately, this responsibility falls on the King, and he must ensure that these parties can improve citizens' lives.

I am not against the idea of a party having six or seven seats in an upcoming government. We should start preparing them so that in the future, we have MPs from the parties who have worked in governments, not just because they are party members, but because they are well-versed in their fields. For example, someone who is an expert in youth issues, water, or energy, in addition to representing their party. I believe this issue requires a gradual approach.

ARTICLES



The 2024 Budget:

New Accounts With the Same Old Challenges

IBRAHIM SAIF

Former Jordanian Minister in several governments, An economist specializing in the political economy of the Middle East, his research focuses on economies in transition, international trade with an emphasis on Jordan and the Middle East, institutional governance, and labor-market economics.

The general budget is widely considered to be a credible document that a government produces in a year. Typically, the general budget shows revenue collected (tax efforts) from the taxpayers either directly or indirectly. The budget also presents governments' priorities mirrored in how the collected revenue is dispersed.

Historically, Jordan has attempted to develop a fiscal policy framework that improves budget performance. Quite recently, on 27 January 2024, Jordan adopted the 2024 budget with expenditures estimated at JOD 12.3 billion and revenues estimated at JOD 10.3 billion, leaving the budget with a deficit of nearly JOD 2.065 billion, equivalent to 5.4% of GDP. Such a deficit will be financed through borrowing either from the domestic or international markets.

The features of the new budget are similar to other budgets adopted in the recent past; high and rigid current expenditures including wages and pension, high interest payments on public debt, and a miniature allocation to capital expenditures. Together these items represent more than 80% of the total public spending.

This article reviews the main parameters of the budget and the primary challenges surrounding the implementation of the 2024 budget. In the conclusion, this article will also outline recommendations for how Jordan can move forward in light of these challenges.

Salient Features

The budget lacks flexibility and has a narrow fiscal space to maneuver. The budget includes few resources that can boost growth in what is known as “pro-cyclical” spending in the Keynesian sense; however, it adds more pressure on the private sector by increasing the tax burden under the slogan of improving tax collection. Such dynamics leave insufficient resources to improve the infrastructure or advance initiatives that would promote growth. On the social front, the budget allocated nearly JOD 818 million to subsidies, strategic commodities, and support for limited income groups. This is an increase of 16% percent for these items compared to 2023.

The government acknowledges that there is a need to address the difficulties facing households in Jordan. However, it can only allocate that much to meet the increasing pressure faced by middle and low income groups.

Reducing public spending is not a realistic option for political and social reasons. Consequently, the budget continues to run a deficit and must borrow from the domestic and international markets to fill in the gap. In the 2024 budget, debt service is expected to reach almost JOD 2 billion making it the largest item in the current expenditures, (18.6% of the current expenditures) close to what is being spent on education and more than what is spent on the health sector. It’s expected that debt service will increase by JOD 277 million in 2024 budget (16%) as a result of the increase in the level of debt and interest rate.

Moreover, if the government accesses the credit market domestically, it threatens to result in the “crowding out effect,” limiting private sector access to the limited domestic credit market. An increase in the cost of borrowing as a result of government competition for loans will impede private sector-led growth.

Gaza War and its implications

The estimates of the 2024 budget were built on the assumption that the actual GDP growth will be 2.8%. As such projections regarding revenue have been built assuming that growth rate will be achieved. However, the Jordanian economy has been adversely affected by the ongoing war in Gaza. There are four main channels through which the war in Gaza has and will affect the Jordanian economy: first, in sectors such as tourism and hospitality. It is estimated that this sector,

which generated USD 6.8 billion as foreign income representing 13.8% of GDP in 2023, has witnessed a decline of 50% across the board, with hotel booking in locations such as Petra dropping even more. As a result of this hit, all activities related to tourism, such as transportation, restaurants entrainments witnessed a drop by varying degrees.

The second channel has been through the implementation (I would not use the implementation.... rather the activation or enforcement) of the boycott. The boycott has affected activities, products, and services that are perceived as “Western products,” associated with or produced in countries where their government sided with Israelis. These products have been subjected to a form of informal boycott which has lowered private consumption.



The estimates of the 2024 budget were built on the assumption that the actual GDP growth will be 2.8%. As such projections regarding revenue have been built assuming that growth rate will be achieved.

The third channel is the uncertainty that surrounds the scene in the region, especially on the side of the private sector. Several investors have postponed or canceled investments, anticipating how the situation will unfold regionally and what the final outcome of the ongoing atrocities by Israel will be. Adding to this, the increase in shipping costs through the Red Sea with 30% of Jordan’s foreign trade passing through that route according to a recent report published by Jordan Strategy Forum⁽¹⁾.

The fourth channel is very much related to the budget, given the heightened security concerns. The increase in the budget’s allocation to enhance security is aimed at maintaining internal stability in the context of heightened emotions and regular protests that have been taking place in Jordan since the 7th of October. Furthermore, the budget aims to bolster security in response to the targeting of Jordan from its North and Eastern borders, with several recent attempts to infiltrate Jordan and stir instability and chaos in the country.

(1) The Impact of the Skirmishes in the Bab-El-Mandeb on Jordanian Trade Flows, Jordan Strategy Forum, December 2023, <https://www.jsf.org/uploads/%D8%A3%D8%AB%D8%B120%D8%A7%D984%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D981%D98%A%20%D985%D8%B6%D98%A%D920%82%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A820%D8%A7%D984%D985%D986%D8%AF%D8%A820%D8%B9%D984%D920%89%D8%A7%D984%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D920%84%D8%A7%D984%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D98%A%20%D8%A7%D984%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D986%D98%A.pdf>

The Way Forward

There are several estimates surrounding the impacts of Gaza war on the Jordanian economy. The IMF's recent MENA Outlook has revised its projection of the growth in the region including Jordan. According to the report "[t]he outlook for the MENA region (including Jordan) is highly uncertain, and downside risks are resurgent. An escalation or spread of the conflict beyond Gaza and Israel, as well as an intensification of the disruptions in the Red Sea, could have a severe economic impact, including on trade and tourism" ⁽²⁾

This downside will adversely affect the projected public revenues which were expected to grow at 8.9% in 2024. The expected decline will exacerbate public finance challenges in 2024 and beyond. To avoid a worsening slowdown in growth, the government may resort to fiscal incentives such as tax breaks, subsidized loans, or a mix of policies similar to the measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic when the government utilized several measures to maintain the economy and assist the private sector in navigating through the economic effects of shutdowns and COVID-19 restrictions. The government should also consider how to improve public spending efficiency, particularly in the health and education sectors, which take in sizable portions of public expenditures. Add to this incentives to motivate the private sector to partner with the government by mobilizing the private sector's own resources through a clear and transparent contractual arrangement especially with the recent amendments to the Public Private Partner (PPP) law.

In the long run, Jordan should consistently pursue its reform agenda articulated in the modernization program, with special emphasis on areas that have cascading economic and social effects, such as improvements in governance and transparency.

Jordan should consider raising public revenues by de-emphasizing regressive indirect taxes, such as the sales tax, and instead focus more on property taxes and capital gains which are currently trivial. Moreover, Jordan should enact a pension reform to ensure sustainability while adopting poverty-targeted assistance in place of arbitrary subsidies that often miss their targeted groups. ⁽³⁾

(2) Middle East and Central Asia, IMF, April 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/MECA>

(3) More details on this issue can be accessed in a recent paper that have been published by the Economic research forum. <https://erf.org.eg/publications/fiscal-policy-private-sector-development-and-social-outcomes-in-an-indebted-arab-country-balancing-austerity-with-pro-growth-policies-in-jordan/>

Post-October 7th Israel:

Tracking Changes in Israel's Social and Political Spheres

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The October 7th attack on Israel shocked Israeli society to its core and posed a pressing question: Does Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fit the bill of leadership in time of crisis? His immediate declaration of war on Hamas and the formation of an emergency government with opposition leader Benny Gantz were crucial components of Netanyahu's approach to the unfolding crisis. The war has thus far resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths and a dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. This article answers the following question: How have events since October 7th changed Israeli society and politics?

Before delving into the unfolding situation, it is important to examine Israel's state on the brink of Hamas' attack. In this regard, three key points warrant consideration. Firstly, Israel is governed by a far-right coalition that has pursued highly destructive policies towards Palestinians. Secondly, Israel experienced unprecedented mass protests against the far-right's judicial reforms before October 7th. Lastly, Netanyahu faced significant challenges due to widespread mistrust among Israelis. Now, six months into the conflict, it is evident that trust in Netanyahu has reached an all-time low, while there is widespread legitimacy and support for the war and its stated objectives. This situation presents a paradox: Israelis are promised one outcome, yet experience another. Put differently, there is a distressing hostage crisis along with families protesting, approximately 200,000 Israelis displaced in both the North and South, uncertain about their return, while the Israeli army continues to grapple with dismantling Hamas, an objective deemed unattainable by experts. Therefore, the path for Israel to regain any semblance of normalcy remains uncertain.

Now, let's delve into the war within the framework of Israel's domestic political divisions. A thorough examination of Israeli politics today reveals an unsustainable situation. While a right-wing faction may emerge to challenge Netanyahu, the ongoing war has subdued much of the political process. However, once the conflict subsides or enters a less intense phase, internal disputes stemming from the controversy surrounding judicial reforms are likely to resurface. Additionally, the likelihood of the departure of Benny Gantz from the war cabinet will spark intense political debates.

In the not-too-distant future, Israel will see a post-Netanyahu era; however, the dynamics of power within Israeli politics are unlikely to shift dramatically from right to left. Instead, it may pave the way for a new style of government akin to the Bennett-Lapid coalition, characterized by diverse ideologies with a stronger emphasis on effective governance and improving regional relations. This new government may prioritize advancing certain international initiatives related to the Israeli-Palestinian issue that do not directly involve Israel.

The current war presents a unique context in Israel's history, marked by profound divisions within Israeli society, stark disagreements between the military establishment and the government, and a collapse of public confidence in the government and its leadership. In early August, military and security officials reportedly cautioned Netanyahu about the detrimental effects of the country's political divisions on the army's readiness for potential conflicts. They expressed grave concerns over the shortage of volunteers for reserve forces, emphasizing that this was eroding the fundamental capabilities and training of the military. In a private meeting, the chiefs of staff presented Netanyahu with data highlighting the insufficient number of volunteer reservists, particularly in the Air Force, and the resulting decline in qualifications. They also discussed the erosion of Israel's deterrence, particularly concerning Hezbollah. Additionally, the Military Intelligence Agency (Aman) communicated concerns to Netanyahu regarding the contentious «judicial reform» plan. Their messages, including one just before the Knesset voted to limit the Supreme Court's use of «reasonableness» as a check on government policy, underscored the security implications of the plan both in the short term and for the future.

Unsurprisingly, support for the war effort extended beyond the traditional avenues of volunteering for reserve forces and backing from opposition parties. It encompassed a wide array of actions filling voids left by the government's retreat in recent years. Notably, protest movements that had previously organized mass demonstrations against Netanyahu's government and advocated for «Jewish democracy» shifted their focus to support the war effort. These movements, including army reservists, members of the security establishment, high-tech activists, the Kaplan Force, Brothers in Arms,

the business community, and various civil society groups, rallied to assist on the home front. Their efforts included providing support to residents of the Gaza periphery who had relocated within Israel, collecting donations and military supplies for the army, raising funds to finance aircraft for repatriating Israelis abroad, purchasing personal equipment for soldiers, and offering food and alternative housing to displaced southern residents. In many instances, these grassroots initiatives supplanted the role traditionally held by the state.

At the same time, Israel has sidestepped addressing crucial questions regarding the underlying factors contributing to the situation. These include the

occupation, the blockade of Gaza, Israel's policy of marginalizing the Palestinian problem, and its refusal to entertain any political resolutions. Additionally, there is a pervasive misconception that incremental economic enhancements in people's daily lives could substitute for their national aspirations. In essence, the approach of pursuing economic peace and managing the conflict by focusing solely on achieving «economic calm» in Gaza is flawed. Proponents of this approach believe it can circumvent the necessity for a comprehensive and equitable resolution to the Palestinian issue. However,



once the conflict subsides or enters a less intense phase, internal disputes stemming from the controversy surrounding judicial reforms are likely to resurface. Additionally, the likelihood of the departure of Benny Gantz from the war cabinet will spark intense political debates.

this belief is not exclusive to Likud; it's embraced across all of Israel's political spectrum.

Presently, in Israel's discourse, there's a conspicuous absence of discussions addressing these critical questions. Neither the media, commentators, nor politicians are engaging with these issues. Instead, the predominant focus is on advocating for maximum violence without constraints. This emphasis persists, fueled by the international community's tacit approval for Israel to respond to the Hamas attack with unrestrained force. Despite the repeated failures of such a security-centric strategy in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as evidenced by Lebanon's experience with Hezbollah and similar conflicts worldwide, this approach continues to be pursued unabated.

With no apparent end in sight, Netanyahu is seemingly inclined to prolong the war to serve his political interests, primarily centered around his survival. However, recent Israeli anti-Netanyahu protests, along with the exhaustion among reservists and the worsening economic conditions, suggest that an early election might be the only viable solution.

To conclude, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under significant domestic pressure as his political adversaries and public opinion in the country unite against his proposed changes to legal and judicial provisions, as well as his efforts to retain power. The sudden and forceful multi-pronged attack by Hamas on October 7th only added to his disappointment. However, with the backing of the United States and Western countries, and with Israel's focus shifting towards defeating Hamas, Netanyahu is experiencing temporary relief from internal political challenges. This respite may prolong his leadership tenure beyond previous expectations. Amid the intense conflict in Gaza, Netanyahu appears to be experiencing a resurgence, likened to a phoenix rising from the ashes of war. However, this resurgence is likely only short-lived. Following the conflict, he will undoubtedly face scrutiny for his failure to prevent the Hamas attack, his support for and empowerment of Hamas to undermine the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and his controversial attempt to enact divisive legislation. This legislation sparked widespread public anger and protests, diverting attention from national priorities such as defense, deterrence, and security.

Syria has Adapted to the Gaza War's Repercussions While its Conflict Dynamics Remain Dominant

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The Gaza war has marked a turning point for regional politics. For Syria, the war and the risk of a regional spillover have just added another layer of complexity to the already complex and uncertain security landscape in Syria. From Iranian-backed militias' attacks on U.S. bases in Northeastern Syria to Israeli airstrikes targeting high-profile IRGC figures and military locations; events like these have become normal in a supposedly frozen conflict. Nevertheless, the internal dynamics of the conflict have remained dominant for Syria's de facto actors amid the increasing violence in the country and the challenges faced by each of them, namely: the Assad regime, the Syrian National Army (SNA), Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This article examines how the security landscape in Syria has adapted to the repercussions of the Gaza war and how the enduring internal conflict dynamics continue to define Syria.

Responses to the Gaza War

All responses of Syria's de-facto actors to the Gaza war remained rhetorical,⁽¹⁾ varying according to their different political alliances. While the Assad regime endorsed Hamas's operation as an act of "resistance" in line with its claim to be a cornerstone of the "axis of resistance" led by Iran; the Syrian opposition, through its political and governance entities, expressed solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, yet opted for referring to the Arab Peace Initiative avoiding any controversy related to Hamas.

HTS endorsed the Hamas operation, considering it an "inspiring" struggle as the former glorifies national Islamist movements, particularly the Taliban and Hamas. For SDF, the group feared the potential spillover repercussions of the Gaza war⁽²⁾ and condemned Hamas but at the same time expressed concerns over the Israeli objective to eradicate the group as SDF draws similarities between its presence in Northeastern Syria and Hamas's presence in Gaza. The result of the Gaza war will either bolster the self-assertiveness of HTS and SDF as hybrid actors if Israel fails to eradicate Hamas or diminish that assertiveness in the scenario that Israel manages to eradicate Hamas.

In practice, all parties have been occupied by internal challenges. Most importantly, just two days before Hamas' October 7th attack, the Assad regime was shocked by an unidentified drone attack on its military academy that killed more than 100,⁽³⁾ carrying out brutal attacks against Northwestern Syria in response. As the UAE warned the regime not to intervene in the Israeli-Hamas war,⁽⁴⁾ the regime refrained from taking part given that it lacks the capacity to survive such an intervention.

The Iran-backed militias, in contrast, have escalated their attacks on the U.S. forces

(1) Fadil Hanci, Gaza War: The Responses of Syria's Local Actors, Omran Strategic Studies, December 21, 2023, <https://omranstudies.org/index.php/publications/articles/gaza-war-the-responses-of-syria%E2%80%99s-local-actors.html>

(2) Fadil Hanci, Gaza War: The Responses of Syria's Local Actors, Omran Strategic Studies, December 21, 2023, <https://omranstudies.org/index.php/publications/articles/gaza-war-the-responses-of-syria%E2%80%99s-local-actors.html>

(3) Reuters in Beirut, More than 100 dead in attack on Syrian military academy, October 5, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/05/syria-military-academy-drone-attack-homs>

(4) Louis Casiano, UAE warns Syria to not get involved in Israel-Hamas war: report, October 9, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/uae-warns-syria-get-involved-israel-hamas-war-report>

since October 2023,⁽⁵⁾ aiming at pressuring the U.S. to withdraw from Syria, thus asserting Tehran's leverage in Syria. This dynamic triggered a debate on a potential U.S. withdrawal from Northeastern Syria. By launching more than 100 attacks against the U.S. bases, the Iran-backed militias, most prominently, "The Islamic Resistance of Iraq"⁽⁶⁾ managed to escalate tensions in Syria. Most significantly, the attack at Tower 22 on the Syrian-Jordanian borders, which killed three American soldiers⁽⁷⁾ and resulted in retaliatory airstrikes by the U.S.⁽⁸⁾

In Southern Syria, Russia has installed additional military posts near the occupied Golan heights to prevent a potential risk of escalation there,⁽⁹⁾ while the Iranian-backed militias' shelling of Israel has not resulted in any Israeli casualties. Yet, Israel has chosen Syria, a playground set to absorb shocks, to inflict damage on Iran by escalating its airstrikes and attacks there, the most prominent of which was its targeting of the Iranian consulate in Damascus in early April. This prompted Iran to initiate a direct but limited retaliation⁽¹⁰⁾ which changed the rules of engagement between the two parties without changing the strategic reality regionally or in Syria.

The Internal Conflict Dynamics Remain Dominant

Against this backdrop, each de-facto actor has been, since mid-2023, facing challenges that remain relevant throughout 2024, yet each of them is adapting to these challenges differently. The Assad regime remains incapable of de-escalating tensions

(5) Rena Netjes & Samer al-Ahmad, Iran is Attempting to Push the United States out of Syria via Hasaka Province, March 8, 2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iran-attempting-push-united-states-out-syria-hasaka-province>

(6) Navvar Şaban, Analyzing Iranian-Orchestrated Attacks on U.S. Bases in Syria and Iraq Post Gaza War, March 7, 2024, <https://omranstudies.org/index.php/publications/reports/analyzing-iranian-orchestrated-attacks-on-u-s-bases-in-syria-and-iraq-post-gaza-war.html>

(7) C. Todd Lopez, 3 U.S. Service Members Killed, Others Injured in Jordan Following Drone Attack, January 29, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3659809/3-us-service-members-killed-others-injured-in-jordan-following-drone-attack/>

(8) CNBC, U.S. launches retaliatory strikes in Iraq, Syria, nearly 40 reported killed, February 3, 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/03/us-starts-retaliatory-strikes-in-iraq-and-syria-against-iran-linked-targets.html>

(9) TASS, Russian military police set up additional checkpoint in Golan Heights area, March 14, 2024, <https://tass.com/politics/1759723>

(10) Michael K. Nagata, Kevin Donegan et al., Defense Rapid Reaction: Iran's unprecedented direct strike against Israel, April 14, 2024, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/defense-rapid-reaction-irans-unprecedented-direct-strike-against-israel>

in Sweida⁽¹¹⁾ where public resentment toward the worsening economy has caused an outpouring of protests that use slogans of the 2011 uprising; however, the regime managed to prevent the risk of spillover to its strongholds in Latakia and Tartus. Jordan's assertive position, which counters drug trafficking as a national security threat, combined with the potential support from local groups in Southern Syria to counter illicit activities,⁽¹²⁾ may constitute another challenge for the regime in Southern Syria, given the limited results the Jordanian engagement with the regime has brought so far. In addition, the U.S. anti-normalization law will likely impose a new layer of pressure on the regime and regional efforts to rehabilitate it, particularly economically, amid the ever-deteriorating economy in Syria.

For the SDF, the tribal revolt against them in mid-2023 has transformed from an armed movement with a zero-sum goal of achieving territorial control, into an armed movement with variable-sum goals of conducting hit-and-run attacks. Apparently, the SDF has managed to adapt to and relatively contain the Arab resentment. Still, the factors that led to the revolt are evident (i.e. PKK cadres' control over SDF and its governance body, forced conscription, and the widespread human rights violations against locals⁽¹³⁾). The Turkish drone operations against the SDF,⁽¹⁴⁾ both its leading figures and infrastructure, are set to cripple the latter's ability of state-building in Syria, as a national security threat given the organic ties between PKK and SDF. Thus, the SDF is likely to remain under internal and external pressures awaiting the future of the U.S. policy in Syria.



Syria has served as a playground for power projection for these actors while ensuring to prevent a potential regional war that may involve Syria.

(11) Yaman Zabad, Sweida uprising in August 2023, August 31, 2023, <https://shorturl.at/qZkYn>.

(12) Fadil Hanci, From Settlement to Captagon: The Security Dynamics in Syria's Daraa, December 23, 2023, <https://politicsociety.org/en/2023/12/23/from-settlement-to-captagon-the-security-dynamics-in-syrias-daraa/>

(13) Sasha Al Alou et al., The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience (Oman for Strategic Studies, 2022)

(14) Ömer Özkızılcık, Türkiye'nin Suriye'deki SİHA Operasyonları, December 29, 2023,

<https://tr.omrandirasat.org/yay%C4%B1nlar%C4%B1m%C4%B1z/raporlar/turkiye%E2%80%99nin-suriye%E2%80%99deki-siha-operasyonlari.html>

The HTS has been occupied with its internal struggle since mid-2023 after arresting hundreds of its members including leading figures, most prominently, Abu Maria al-Qahtani,⁽¹⁵⁾ under accusations of espionage, who was killed in an explosion in early April. The arrests and the use of systematic torture have triggered resentment within both the HTS's military/security wings as well as on a popular level. HTS leadership has been countering these challenges by releasing prisoners, paying compensations, paying visits to localities, promising reform, and using limited violence as means of persuasion and coercion. Although the HTS seems to have adapted to this challenge, betting on further time to resolve it through internal mechanisms, the risks of the challenge are likely to remain relevant in the near future.

The SNA, in contrast, has been preoccupied with its attempts to reorganize the opposition factions under the command of the defense ministry of the Interim Government in response to HTS attempts to expand into SNA's territories. By rearranging the economics of the factions, attempting to establish a central force through bolstering the role of the military police and establishing a military academy, isolating HTS-backed groups in SNA-controlled areas, dismantling their alliance "Tajamu al-Shahbaa" and reintegrating the small groups into the SNA; the defense ministry seeks to counter the challenge posed by HTS.

Syria: Increasing Fragility

The Gaza war's repercussions in Syria remained under control, and the escalations that involved Iran, Israel, and the U.S. did not impact the overall status quo of the frozen conflict in Syria. Yet, Syria has served as a playground for power projection for these actors while ensuring to prevent a potential regional war that may involve Syria. On the other hand, de-facto actors have been occupied with the internal conflict dynamics, mainly the internal challenges they have been facing.

(15) Asharq Al Awsat, Top Iraqi Militant Leader Killed in Suicide Bombing in Northwest Syria, April 5, 2024, <https://english.aawsat.com/arab-world/4950166-top-iraqi-militant-leader-killed-suicide-bombing-northwest-syria>

While all parties will most likely remain occupied with these challenges throughout 2024, they all appear to have adapted to their respective challenges as much as they adapted to the implications of the Gaza war. Nevertheless, these challenges and adaptation processes favor change over continuity. As territorial control of each actor has remained the same since March 2020, change is occurring within each zone of influence separately amid the increasing violence country-wide, a dynamic that showcases the increasing fragility and uncertainty stemming from the reality that the current status quo is not sustainable forever.

REPORTS

The Post-War Dynamics of Jordanian-Israeli Relations:

Insights from Israeli Academia

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Report objectives:

This report aims to understand the academic approaches in Israeli research institutions that outline the expected shape of Jordanian-Israeli relations during and after the 2023-24 Gaza War. This understanding helps provide an additional lens to shape Jordanian perceptions of Israel in its current transitional phase under Netanyahu's leadership until the next government comes, which will undoubtedly carry new dimensions and formulations. These new dimensions could either have a military-institutional nature left by the current government or take on a different form, whether more rigid or more open than previous governments. This depends on the ongoing decisive war that continues to leave its comprehensive impacts, accompanied by changes in the region and the world.

Sources:

In this report, we relied on academic and research sources represented by research centers within political departments in Israeli universities, as well as think tanks such as The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune, a platform that addresses Israeli-American perspectives from academic and practical viewpoints. We examined an article by Ruth Yaron, a former diplomat in the Jordanian office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and spokesperson for the IDF ⁽¹⁾.

Additionally, we reviewed a comprehensive set of papers by Colonel Shaul Shay, a university lecturer and director of research at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), an independent research center

(1) Ruth Yaron, The Israel-Jordan Relationship: Jordan's Strategic Anxiety Requires More Israeli Attention, October 2023, <https://jstribune.com/yaron-the-israel-jordan-relationship/>

focusing on terrorism, homeland security, risk assessment, intelligence analysis, national security, and defense - affiliated with Reichman University, a private, non-profit institution⁽²⁾.

We also included a brief article by lecturers from the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), an independent, non-partisan institute established after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 at Tel Aviv University. The institute's philosophy is based on the belief that one of the reasons for the surprise of the war was the lack of recognition of institutional efforts. If such an institute had existed at the time, it might have questioned the intelligence assessment that the war was unlikely⁽³⁾.

We also reviewed a policy paper presented by Colonel Dr. Eran Lerman, the former Deputy Director for Foreign Policy and International Affairs at the National Security Council in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office. This paper was published by the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS), which adopts realistic positions on Israeli national security⁽⁴⁾.

We also monitored available research articles by university professors published in Israeli newspapers, such as the centrist-conservative Maariv newspaper⁽⁵⁾.

Introduction

The ongoing events of the current war continue to collide with the most intricate international and institutional structures at all levels, regardless of their intensity and complexity. This constitutes a turning point that prompts the reexamination of numerous questions that have been sidelined in favor of dealing with daily realities and immediate challenges. This shift has added weight to the strategic dimension in regional planning, which is crucial for understanding regional power dynamics and zero-sum equations in such wars and humanitarian crises, which have political, social, and anticipated implications at the state level.

The Jordanian-Israeli question, with all its historical facts and political complexities, stands as one of the most significant propositions we

(2) Shaul Shay, Jordan and the War on Gaza, October 19, 2023, <https://ict.org.il/jordan-and-the-war-in-gaza/>

(3) Adam Sharon & Ofir Winter, Jordan and the War in Israel: Between Public Opinion and Diplomacy, October 25, 2023, https://www.inss.org.il/social_media/jordan-and-the-war-in-israel-between-public-opinion-and-diplomacy/

(4) Eran Lerman, Jordan's role in a possible Saudi-Israeli-American deal: A vital link in the chain, October 8, 2023, [https://jiss.org.il/en/lerman-jordans-role-in-a-possible-](https://jiss.org.il/en/lerman-jordans-role-in-a-possible-saudi-israeli-american-deal/)

[saudi-israeli-american-deal/](https://jiss.org.il/en/lerman-jordans-role-in-a-possible-saudi-israeli-american-deal/)

(5) Orit Miller, מילר | מילר, הגיע הזמן שבישראל וירדן יבינו ששלוש לא רק על הנייר | מילר, כתב February 6, 2024, <https://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/opinions/Article-1073885>

Shay Har-Zvi, | חבית נפץ מול ירדן - חבית נפץ מול ירדן - חבית נפץ מול ירדן, הגבלת כניסת ערביי ישראל להר הבית - חבית נפץ מול ירדן, דעה, February 20, 2024, <https://m.maariv.co.il/journalists/opinions/Article-1077703>

aim to dissect. This effort seeks to comprehend the foundational shifts occurring within the current war and anticipate its future dimensions within the context of this intricate relationship. Furthermore, it raises relevant questions about the capacity of both regimes to construct a political agenda capable of either containing or excluding the other, based on recent reactions observed during the ongoing war. Additionally, it prompts considerations about the degree of each party's preoccupation with key domestic and foreign issues, whether through postponement, prioritization, or neglect, influenced by the priorities of the war and the phase's exigencies.

Jordanian International Discourse

The country of Jordan and its institutions that are represented at the international level, have an excellent reputation for their moderate discourse that stands at the forefront of international stance in their ominous stages, in comparison to the inflammatory regional nature around Jordan and the amount of internal and external pressures that are focused on the concept of "reception," whether in the file of regional escalations, the refugee file, the security situation and complexities along the border with Israel. The state of moderation

that is being worked on as an internal and external agenda is a necessity for Jordan and it is inevitable for all international spectra to respect the difficulty of maintaining and trying to sustain it as much as possible.

From the outset of the war on Gaza, a unique diplomatic and media activity from Jordan has been observed, represented by the appearance of the most prominent representatives of the country headed by the royal family represented by the king, queen, and crown prince; and the Jordanian diplomatic face which is represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Prime Minister, Ayman Al-Safadi.

Since the beginning of the war, King Abdullah has contributed to directing an international Jordanian discourse⁽⁶⁾ that carries cumulative rather than immediate meanings, in which the King reaffirmed all the warnings he had made over the years in all his interviews and seminars in which he participated. In those he shared about the danger of not seeking realistic and constructive solutions, such as the two-state

(6) King Abdullah II, King of Jordan: A two-state solution would be a victory for our common humanity, November 14, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/11/14/king-abdullah-jordan-two-state-solution/>

solution as an example, and that the time that is passing without clear and frank solutions will lead to an explosion, not a breakthrough, which is what we are witnessing in the Gaza war and the difficult periods that preceded it, which contributed to amplifying the intensity of the current conflict.

The King's tours in international decision-making rooms continue with a clear affirmative speech on the need to stop all forms of systematic violence against civilians in Gaza, while the Queen continues these tours in the course of interviews⁽⁷⁾ in famous media programs in which the most prominent Jordanian humanitarian orientation that denounces the distorted global reality that brings more contradiction and complexity of the crisis. In the same way, the Minister of Foreign Affairs engaged in all forums in which the presence of a moderate and realistic Jordanian voice in a diplomatic manner was necessary. This was reflected by the global circles being both supportive and opposed to his presence. His activity was represented by statements about the water and electricity agreements, the overlooked peace

agreement of Wadi Araba⁽⁸⁾, and the withdrawal of ambassadors which was widely reported⁽⁹⁾, within the threat of any agenda that leads to any path ending in displacement and an alternative homeland, which are considered red lines to the Jordanian foreign policy⁽¹⁰⁾.

Supporters of Israeli interests, as well as Israeli circles, viewed the Jordanian reaction to be full of aggressive speeches towards the war in the nature of the descriptions and terms that were repeated and directed towards the Israeli side. This intensity was considered to result from people's propitiatory dimensions (of the Palestinian-Jordanian weight) in keeping with internal tension among people and their sensitivity towards the Palestinian issue which contributed to the development of the discourse

(8) ملك الأردن "غاضب" والغبار طال، *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, رف "وادي عربة" .. الصفدي يلوح بـ "تجميد متدرج" للمعاهدة "ويلغي" المشروع الإماراتي", November 16, 2023, <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D985%D984%D983-%D8%A7%D984%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D986-%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%A8-%D988%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9-84-%D8%B1%D981-%D988%D8%A7%D8%AF%D98%A-%D8%B9%D8%B1/>

(9) Lazar Berman, Jordan recalls ambassador from Israel to protest carnage in war with Hamas, November 1, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/jordan-recalls-ambassador-from-israel-to-protest-carnage-in-war-with-hamas/amp/>

(10) *Al-Jazeera*, ملك الأردن يحذر من محاولة تهجير اللاجئين إلى عمان ومصر, October 17, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.net/amp/news/202317/10/%D985%D984%D983-%D8%A7%D984%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D986-%D988%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D985%D986-%D985%D8%AD%D8%A7%D988%D984%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D987%D8%AC%D98%A%D8%B1>

(7) Marc Rod, Jordan's queen downplays role of Oct. 7 as cause of the war in Gaza, February 28, 2024, <https://jewishinsider.com/202402/jordans-queen-downplays-role-of-oct-7-as-cause-of-the-war-in-gaza/>

over time. This was analyzed within the framework of popular Jordanian politics that could escalate within internal templates that do not carry strategic implications - until the moment - on the long horizon in dealing with the Israeli file and a change in the direction of Jordanian politics in the transitional period after the era of Netanyahu. In addition to regional complications, this clashes with Al-Safadi's handling of a more sensitive direction in his speeches such as the issue of water and the overlooking of the peace agreement of Wadi Araba, which raises the question of post-war calm in the Israeli cabinet and the beginning of understanding the Israeli mechanism of dealing with Jordan within the equation of regional complexity that may be left as it is or witness a large-scale collision that makes tactical calculations more difficult than it is to begin or implement, whether From the Jordanian or Israeli side.

The Jordanian Public and the Security Calculations

The Jordanian international stance is in harmony with the civil directions and the extent of the existential ties between the two peoples. However, the state of the street can be understood by the Israeli side as being like other people's demands in another country

that is sympathetic to Palestinians and carries meanings of total Israeli exclusion. However, the Jordanian case constitutes a greater momentum for fears, whether in the form of protests⁽¹¹⁾ in front of the Israeli embassy or attempts to approach the border and other regular incidents in Jordan against Israel as Jordan meets on its eastern borders with Israel and forms a connection point (crossing station) to Israel with important regional points in Israel's future strategic plans. Therefore, the internal picture of Jordan, in terms of escalation and people mobilization, may be considered a reflection of Israeli approaches that may take into account the potential explosion as a moderate priority in dealing with the Jordanian file, or on the other hand, the state of internal escalation may have its negative side taken into account in the field of systematic Israeli employment of the issue of identity cracks and Jordanian questions that could be addressed and kept under the Jordanian moderation in anticipation of it being exploited by many poles seeking to inflame the internal situation under many premises. This raises a question about the steps that Jordan will take to contain an issue that may take a negative turn which may be

(11) Reuters, Jordanians marching on Israeli embassy clash with police, call to 'bomb Tel Aviv', March 25, 2024, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/jordanians-marching-on-israeli-embassy-clash-with-police-call-to-bomb-tel-aviv

easily exploited if the spot becomes available for someone to fill it regionally.

Netanyahu and the Israeli Institutional Legacy

Netanyahu's presence in power in this war is considered a transitional factor in understanding the form of the next government and the nature of the people's demands for the priorities of the post-war political phase in light of a political environment dealt with a legislative-judicial clash, a sharp wave of the rise of the religious right-wing and the necessity of its political presence. Netanyahu's personality has been and still is clashing with Jordan on many issues dating back to a hidden history in the form of settlement solutions and the ongoing escalation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem at the expense of the Jordanian presence, which is met with a state of rejection of discussions in which Jordan is a vital party, in addition to the unjustified escalations from symbols representing the Netanyahu government towards Jordan. His government always has room for Jordan, but in a negative way from which there is little hope.

This is recently attested in attempts to overstep Jordan, its location, and its status to new regional actors with the possibility of cooperation in

which Jordan would be a transit station in its literal rather than practical sense. This leaves a gap in the Jordanian role, a questionable question regarding the extent of the ability to reclaim vital interests that go beyond the security and strategic dimension, which is being ignored and complicated by Israeli mismanagement alongside the continuation of the war in Gaza and the continuation of pressures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This leaves us questioning the extent of the ability to continue these methods and patterns towards Jordan after the Jordanian stance on the war and the completely negative public sentiment towards Israel.

We can attempt to prioritize the Israeli political agenda in the context of war as follows: the existential threat of war first, the Hamas factor and leveraging it as a clear enemy second, and the American administration's efforts to maintain the status quo as long as possible, thus burdening it with regional responsibilities, third. Interwoven with each of these points is the attempt to manage the internal Israeli situation across various Israeli institutions. From this perspective, we can assert that Jordan, amid the ongoing war, does not rank among the primary existential threats to Israel's interests. Historically marginalized in administrative,

logistical, and cooperative economic plans, Jordan's current standing in these areas reflects a similar status quo. The long-term implications of the Abraham Accords are becoming evident, with potential impacts on Jordan's role given the prominence of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the shifting roles of key players, especially regarding the custodianship issue. This raises many questions about what remains for Jordan and what consequences arise from such an oversight, particularly in the context of an active conflict where the scenario of displacement remains a significant concern. The regional policymaker's focus includes Iran, Syria, and the smuggling routes, which present mutual threats to both Jordan and Israel, with Israel viewing the Iranian threat as an enduring existential and propagandistic danger.

Israeli Critical Approaches Toward Jordan

In analyzing academic discourses published in universities and by diplomatic experts regarding recommendations for the Israeli government on Jordan and the most prominent thing that can be remedied, it becomes evident that, although limited, they were all similar in propositions and are generally moderate in a diplomatic context that recognizes the strategic importance of maintaining beneficial relations with Jordan based on four considerations: the

entangled right-wing, a military leadership in preparation, a center-left weighing its future calculations, and a religious sector examining its ideological horizons.

These perspectives emphasize the need to elevate Jordan's position and prioritize it in Israeli agendas post-war, asserting that Jordan's involvement in any future agreements is crucial for Israeli steps amidst regional tensions particularly concerning East Jerusalem, as any accumulated escalations do not serve either party, especially given the underappreciated and practically unexamined status of Jordan's role by Israel, which has significantly contributed to current complexities. Positive proposals toward Jordan stem from the belief that recommendations previously given to administrations on how to win Jordan's favor are cumulative, have already been set, and have consistently been included in Israeli governmental recommendations in the form of its interaction with Jordan. The Israeli institutional cooperation⁽¹²⁾ with Jordan surpasses any troubled or strained agreements with Saudi Arabia, where for example, it's possible to overlook the Jordanian role in the

(12) Shay Har-Zvi, Jordan - Between Strategic Interests and Domestic Constraints, September, 2023, <https://www.runi.ac.il/en/research-institutes/government/ips/activities/newsletter/har-zvi-1723-11-e/>

agreement, but not its existence as a part of it. The formation of the next Israeli government will indicate whether the current approach with Jordan, established under Netanyahu, will continue or if a new, ideologically divergent approach will be adopted despite the partisan and ideological intensity that will take regional events to other strategic measures and integrate it into Israeli institutional practices for the future.

Jordan Amid Iranian-Israeli Strikes

With Iranian retaliation targeting Israel traversing Jordanian airspace, international political arenas, particularly Israeli circles under American care, have intensified their focus on modeling Jordanian responses across multiple contexts. Israeli entities, supported by the U.S., have advocated for restructuring roles and addressing strategic weaknesses with Jordan in terms of strategic support in all its forms over the longer term to create positive opportunities for future Jordanian-Israeli relations⁽¹³⁾. This aligns with the first interpretation that Jordan, aided by the U.S., is part of the missile defense equation for Israel by shooting down the Iranian missiles.

However, Jordan's official stance, represented by Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi, objected to this, emphasizing Jordanian sovereignty and the necessity of separating accumulated Israeli hostility from Jordan's national security against the Iranian intentions that have surfaced via its regional networks around Jordan.

In using the recent incident, some think tanks⁽¹⁴⁾ have drawn parallels to the Black September conflict as one of the sides through the situation of the Iranian interventions in the region and the local support for pro-Iran and Hamas movements destabilize Jordan, fueling widespread hatred. This perspective recalls the 1970s scenarios, proposing that similar tactics could re-emerge. Additionally, outlets like The New York Times have highlighted⁽¹⁵⁾ Jordan as an unexpected player in the Iranian assault. This indicates a marked shift in the near future of the form the Jordanian data is received with a fertile ground for change in the relationship dynamics among Jordan, Israel, and the U.S., emphasizing the necessity for coordinated efforts to prevent uncalculated errors where other political structures could benefit from

(13) Ofir Winter, A Warming Peace: Jordan's Role in Curbing Iran's Attack, April 16, 2024, https://www.inss.org.il/social_media/a-warming-peace-jordans-role-in-curbing-irans-attack/

(14) Ruth Wassermann Lande, Unity is more than just a naïve cliché, it's a matter of national security – opinion, April 12, 2024, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-796598>

(15) Liam Stack, An Unexpected Player in Israel's Defense: Jordan, Home to Many Palestinians, April 14, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/14/world/middleeast/jordan-israel-iran-drones.html>

exaggerating the scene and amplifying conflicts. The internal Jordanian situation, with its economic and social branches, is also a focal point for Israeli analysts, such as those at the Jerusalem Institute⁽¹⁶⁾ for Policy Research. They view Jordan's economic struggles and public responses to its government as vulnerabilities that Iran, through proxies like Hamas, can exploit. Alongside the American support, material and moral assistance from the Gulf states will be crucial to prevent any destabilization in Jordan, which could trigger a domino effect across the region which might amplify the uncertainty and transform minor issues into significant points of contention, highlighting the delicate balance of regional stability since the war's inception.

Conclusions

We came up with a set of observations and outputs that were included in the report through the quality and availability of the sources we analyzed. The most notable of these are:

1. The limited sources addressing the relationship between Jordan and Israel in the current war are notable, especially as the war

has reached its halfway mark. We derived several explanations for this observation, which we analyzed in the report. These include the Israeli priority scale in the current war and the regional and international complexity, the previous Jordanian tension with the right-wing government that gradually distanced Jordan from the scene and sought to undermine its importance in various ways, and the consideration that if the Jordanian issue were taken more seriously, it would impose realities that would further complicate the already deteriorating relations between both sides since the beginning of the current war.

2. The moderate and diplomatic approach predominates in initiatives concerning Jordan, while we found an absence in the academic context that addresses Jordan from right-wing conservative perspectives in terms of foreign relations and expected roles.

3. Difficulty accessing some Israeli research center websites through their online links, either due to site blocking or maintenance issues with the institutes' online platforms.

4. It was clear that the majority of moderate proposals are not reactionary to war events

(16) Yoni Ben Menachem, Iran and Hamas Are Seeking to Destabilize the Jordanian Government, April 7, 2024, <https://jcpa.org/iran-and-hamas-are-seeking-to-destabilize-the-jordanian-government/>

but are based on a series of previous works such as articles and decision papers that were adopted during the Trump presidency and during the Abraham Accords negotiations. They addressed formulations recommending containment of Jordan and avoiding various forms of escalation.

5. The materials we have analyzed share several key points that are central to considering Jordan as a pivotal party in any expected future relationship with Israel. It is essential to consider Jordan's specificity regarding national security and its unique position in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

6. It was noted in the comparison between the Israeli perceptions that were the focus of the report that they are similar to or share the American diplomatic character in terms of raising the value of interests and the composition of internal and external Jordanian priorities.

7. Coverage of events related to Jordan is mostly limited to news sites that deal with regional and global affairs and social media platforms concerned with regional news.

8. It is likely that there is a relationship worth exploring regarding the fact that the majority of academic figures advocating for the containment

of the Jordanian side have served in military institutions and departments responsible for national security. This is reflected, after their service and experiences, in the perspective they currently hold towards Jordanian-Israeli interests.

ANALYSIS



"October 7th" and Its Internal Palestinian Consequences:

The "Flood" of Resistance and the "Zero-Sum" Factions

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On October 7, 2023, the world awoke to a significant military operation carried out by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), from the Palestinian Gaza Strip against Israeli camps, military bases, and settlements surrounding the strip.

The repercussions of this event continue to unfold and remain active as of the writing of this analysis, nearly seven months into the war. This analysis focuses on the meaning of this "event" in terms of the relationships among Palestinian factions, the situation of Palestinian resistance, and the ability of its factions to form a united Palestinian leadership that represents and leads the Palestinian movement and addresses the question: Will the map of Palestinian forces and

leadership change as a result of October 7th?

The basic thesis in this analysis is that while the reality of the pressing occupation, settlement plans, and denial of the Palestinians' national rights repeatedly led to the "flood" point where the Palestinians launched waves of confrontation and resistance, there is a state of polarization between the factions, specifically between the two largest factions; The Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) and Hamas, both of which have a zero-sum view of each other, meaning they do not see an opportunity for compromise and to work together. But at the same time, neither of them has the ability or opportunity to be in a position of official and actual leadership at the same time, anytime soon.

To answer questions about the meaning and repercussions of "October 7th" internally in Palestine, we can start from several headings; the first relates to the inevitability of resistance with a content analysis of the meaning of the "flood", with a presentation of the unique situation in Gaza where there is a "surplus of life suffering", and a "surplus of force" with the Hamas movement.

In the second heading, the analysis starts with the saying "the gun sows and the politics harvests" to clarify the relationship between resistance actions on the ground and the mechanisms of transforming those actions into political achievements, and the difficulty of achieving this in the Palestinian context.

In the third section ("The Exclusivity of Arms: Role and Status"), the analysis examines the fate of Palestinian leadership in terms of role and status, concluding that while the status of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Fatah movement is declining, Hamas is not close to replacing them or taking over the leadership from Fatah.

The fourth section provides an example of how the two main factions (Fatah

and Hamas) view their relationship as a zero-sum game with no room for joint action. The conclusion is that there is an urgent need for Palestinians to move beyond this zero-sum situation.

First: Terms of the "Flood": "Excess of Suffering" and "Excess of Power"

The Hamas movement chose the name "Al-Aqsa Flood" for its operation on October 7th, which may refer to the magnitude of the action. According to a statement by Mohammad Deif, Hamas's military leader, made simultaneously with the operation's launch, the operation was a response to "Israeli violations in the courtyards of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian citizens in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the occupied interior." However, the events and indicators explaining why Hamas carried out this operation, including statements by Hamas leaders and official statements from the movement, clarify that what happened is primarily related to the state of tension and siege in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, it can be said that this tension "overflowed" and resulted in this attack.

This tension includes, besides the daily hardships of life in Gaza, other issues such as the Palestinian prisoners' issue, the threat to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and settlement activities in the West Bank. However, the situation in the Gaza Strip appears to be the primary pressing factor. Understanding what happened on October 7th requires reading this extreme pressure, which reached the level of a "flood," in connection with another term: "excess of power."



There is no doubt that some of the direct goals of the “October 7th” operation were to take prisoners from the Israeli army and exchange them for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, which is what the Hamas document indicated, but another basic goal was to change the reality of the Gaza Strip.

The leader of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, summed up this situation (the pressing crisis and excess of power) following the May 2021 confrontation, which

the resistance called the "Sword of Jerusalem"⁽¹⁾. After that confrontation, Sinwar said about the living situation in the Strip, "We will burn the green and the dry" if this matter is not resolved. However, he clarified at the same time that his movement, specifically the military wing, does not suffer materially and relies on parties including Iran and Hezbollah. He said in a press conference broadcast by the media, "All thanks to the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has not withheld from us throughout the past years, nor from the other resistance factions, with money, weapons, and expertise." Commenting on funding the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, he said: "We will not ask anyone for money, even one penny for Hamas or Al-Qassam, Hamas and Al-Qassam have their own sources and revenues, and they do not need to take from aid money, grants, and reconstruction funds."

In this sense, what happened in October 2023 is a result of a contradictory situation, combining the humanitarian living catastrophe, which reached the point of starvation in the Gaza Strip⁽²⁾,

(1) This confrontation began due to the state of tension in Jerusalem, against the backdrop of Israeli moves to confiscate homes from a historic Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem (Sheikh Jarrah), and the ongoing violations by settlers of Al-Aqsa Mosque, where the resistance in the Gaza Strip initiated a missile attack followed by a response with Israeli bombing and attacks on the Strip.

(2) Regarding the harsh living conditions in the Gaza Strip and the systematic Israeli starvation, there are many international and Arab sources that document this, including a documentary program broadcast by Arab TV, in Lusail, Qatar, entitled

contrasted by a state of relative abundance and self-sufficiency for the armed wing of Hamas in particular, and for the movement in general.

This situation formed an impasse in itself, as the resistance came to be blamed for its strength in Gaza not being useful in stopping the aggressions in Jerusalem and the West Bank, or in lifting the ongoing siege for 17 years in the Strip. In the document issued by Hamas in January 2024, entitled "This is Our Narrative, Why the Al-Aqsa Flood happened", the 17-year siege on the Gaza Strip was the first direct reason mentioned by the movement after the reasons related to the 105-year history of Palestinian struggle. The movement even mentioned the failure to resolve the Palestinian issue in the United Nations and the failure of the peace process as reasons for what happened.

There is no doubt that some of the direct goals of the "October 7th" operation were to take prisoners from the Israeli army and exchange them for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, which is what the Hamas document indicated, but another basic goal was to change the reality of the Gaza Strip.

In fact, the operation and its major results, which surprised Hamas itself, as much as they surprised the world, as a result of what Hamas described in its document as "the complete and rapid collapse of the Israeli security and military system," required rearranging internal Palestinian relations so that the Israeli reaction could be quickly curbed. In order for the military action to be translated into a political product, this assumed a kind of rearrangement of the relationship between the Fatah and Hamas movements.

Second: The Political Harvest of Military Action

While Hamas took the initiative in military action in the Strip, the officially recognized international and legal leadership of the Palestinian people is represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority has suffered complete marginalization and siege by Israel, with many international parties participating in the siege against it. In recent years, since the presidential term of Donald J. Trump and his administration (2017-2021), most international and Arab aid to the Palestinian Authority has stopped. The Israeli

"The Starvation War...Israel's Red Lines in Gaza," on May 15, 2024, and included documentation of starvation plans over a period of about a quarter of a century.

government has confiscated and halted customs revenues on goods imported by Palestinians, which is the main source of funding for the Authority's operations in the West Bank and Gaza.

Later on, the world has watched the administration of US President Joseph Biden clearly announce at the beginning of his term (2021) that resolving the Palestinian issue is not on his current agenda and is not a priority⁽³⁾.

The "October 7th" operation seemed like a historic opportunity. It created a momentum and a mix of conditions that could be leveraged by Abbas and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to speak on behalf of Palestinians and act as a kind of intermediary with the resistance. They could lead the political reaction to proposals suggesting the exclusion of Palestine from regional and international agendas. By doing so, the organization could reclaim its position on two levels: internationally, as an effective and acceptable representative since the world urgently needs an acceptable intermediary representing Palestinians; and on the second level, with Hamas, which also needs an acceptable intermediary.

Perhaps the Palestinian leadership could have imposed conditions and made demands from both sides: the international-Israeli side and the resistance factions in Gaza.

However, the Palestinian leadership did not go in this direction. Despite refusing to condemn the operation or explicitly stand against the resistance factions, the official Palestinian level distanced itself from Hamas's policies. For example, President Abbas affirmed in several instances, including during his conversation with Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro a few days after the war began, that Hamas's policies and actions do not represent the Palestinian people. He stated that the policies, programs, and decisions of the Palestinian Liberation Organization are the ones that represent the Palestinian people, as it is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority announced their position that they would not return to the Gaza Strip “on the back of an Israeli tank⁽⁴⁾”. Palestinian Prime Minister at the time, Mohammad Shtayyeh, stated, "For the Palestinian Authority to return to

(3) Hesham Youssef, 10 Things to Know: Biden's Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, June 10, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/202110-/06/things-know-bidens-approach-israeli-palestinian-conflict>

(4) Kifah Zaboun, an official confirms that the solution in Gaza is political, not by force and Shtayyeh refuses settlement, *The Middle East*, November 6, 2023.

Gaza and manage its affairs without a political solution for the West Bank is like saying the authority would return on an F-16 plane or an Israeli tank. I do not accept this, our President (Mahmoud Abbas) does not accept it, and none of us accepts it." He added, "I believe what we need is a comprehensive and peaceful vision," and emphasized that "the West Bank needs a solution, and then Gaza, within the framework of a two-state solution⁽⁵⁾."

Such statements from Ramallah, despite rejecting any bargaining regarding the replacement of Hamas in Gaza without a comprehensive political solution, did not include any indication of coordination with Hamas or a desire for a unified stance. Instead, they stipulated that in the new arrangements after the war, this should be within a political framework for the overall Palestinian situation. Thus, the fundamental position, even if war is rejected, insists on a political framework for post-war scenarios (which can also be seen as post-Hamas).

Fatah expressed this position more clearly when the Palestinian President appointed Mohammed Mustafa to form a new Palestinian government in March 2024. At that time, Hamas protested

and issued a statement, along with other Palestinian factions like Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Palestinian National Initiative, criticizing the formation of the government "without national consensus, reinforcing a policy of singularity, and deepening division, at a crucial historical moment when our people and their national cause need consensus and unity the most."

Fatah's response to the factions' statement was a clear revelation of the movement's position regarding the question of coordination with Hamas. In a statement issued by the movement, it said, "Whoever caused Israel's reoccupation of the Gaza Strip and led to the catastrophe experienced by the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza, does not have the right to dictate national priorities." The movement considered that "who is actually disconnected from reality and from the Palestinian people is the leadership of Hamas, which until this moment has not realized the magnitude of the disaster experienced by our oppressed people in the Gaza Strip and in the rest of the Palestinian territories." Fatah expressed its "surprise and condemnation" of Hamas' words about "singularity and division," asking, "Did Hamas consult the Palestinian leadership or any other Palestinian party when it made its decision

(5) Palestinian Authority will not return to Gaza on the back of an Israeli tank. Al-Ghad (Jordanian Newspaper), October 30, 2024.

to embark on the adventure of October 7th last year, which led to a “Nakba” more devastating and harsher than the “Nakba” of 1948?” It continued, “Did Hamas consult the Palestinian leadership while negotiating, now, with Israel and offering concession after concession, with no goal other than to receive assurances for its personal security, and attempting to reach an agreement with Netanyahu again to maintain its divisive role in Gaza and the Palestinian arena?”

These positions were clear evidence that the idea of political unity of the legal and political leadership (PLO and PA) with the Hamas movement and the fighters in Gaza is not on the table. This is despite the fact that Israel also rejected any role for the Authority and continued its siege in the West Bank. However, this raised a question about the role and status of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the future.



There is an almost consensus on a saying repeated by many politicians and observers, which is that "there is no intifada without Fatah and no settlement without Hamas

Third: Role and Status

This war raised questions about who decides Palestinian action and who is the actual leader. In the past, before the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were the decision-makers and were able, through the organization or factional coordination, to reach common strategies. This began to decline with the First Intifada when Hamas was founded and was not part of the unified national leadership for the intifada that brought together factions of the main organization. However, Fatah remained the backbone of Palestinian action, given its position in the leadership of the organization and its strength on the ground. This was fundamentally evident in the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 when Fatah led in coordination with Hamas and the other resistance factions within the framework of the intifada through a group of leaders, most notably Marwan Barghouti, the imprisoned member of Fatah's Central Committee, who held the position of head of the Supreme Movement Committee when the intifada broke out and who has been incarcerated since 2002. Even until Barghouti's arrest and the death of President Yasser Arafat in 2004, Fatah had the largest share of the decision-making regarding escalation and de-escalation, surpassing even Hamas, whose popularity and role were rising.

Gradually, a division occurred among the public, the most important of which is the control of the Fatah movement and the Palestinian Authority over the situation in the West Bank, versus Hamas' forceful control of the Gaza Strip, by military force, since 2007. This military control took place after it won the Legislative Council elections in 2006, which took place in turn, after Israel's withdrawal from the strip in 2005. In practice, a state of polarization arose within the Palestinian arena. But neither faction can no longer decide on an integrated Palestinian strategy for all Palestinians.

There is an almost consensus on a saying repeated by many politicians and observers, which is that "there is no intifada without Fatah and no settlement without Hamas⁽⁶⁾." Hani Al-Masri says in one of his articles, "It is said that there is no war without Hamas, and no intifada without Fatah". What is meant by this saying is that the Fatah movement has a huge human reserve on the ground, an organizational legacy, and authority institutions, which makes the idea of an intifada, i.e., a comprehensive popular uprising, (in the West Bank) without its consent and leadership impossible.

(6) Among the articles and writings that adopted this statement: Nasser Al-Laham, There is no uprising without Fatah and no settlement without Hamas. Ma'an News Agency, December 16, 2018. And Hani Al-Masry, do not burden "Areen Al-Usood" more than it can bear, Masarat Center, October 25, 2022.

On the other hand, Hamas has become the one that has the decision of military confrontation in the Gaza Strip, and the ability, even with military operations of limited impact, to set the pace and rhythm of political action in the West Bank, but without having the legal representative power or sufficient ability to determine the rhythm of performance of the Palestinian public.

Therefore, there is a sense that Fatah has lost its previous role, which Yasser Arafat used to describe, or the role of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a whole, as the representative of the Palestinian people, but it has not lost it to a specific party. Hamas is far from having the ability to mobilize the Palestinian public alone or possessing an internationally acceptable representational status. This has firstly created a dilemma of duality in the Palestinian street between the ability for popular action and legal representation on one hand (which Fatah possesses), and military action on the other hand led by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. It has also created a problem of a vacuum in Palestinian strategy, in terms of the absence of a comprehensive organized popular movement, which became apparent in the absence of a solidarity movement or peaceful resistance in the West Bank equivalent to the discourse

in Gaza after October 7th, and in terms of the absence of an acceptable political leadership to speak on behalf of all Palestinians including the besieged in Gaza.

In the West Bank itself, multiple armed groups appeared, especially in the northern West Bank, in Jenin Refugee Camp, Tulkarm, and the Old City of Nablus, between the years 2021-2024, and the Palestinian Authority became either a mere witness of the confrontation between the groups and Israel (the Israeli army and the settlers), or in a position of the accused of working against these groups⁽⁷⁾.

If it is natural that the role of any authority in the world is to protect its people and lead them in the face of any security threat, meet their living needs, and represent them politically, then the Palestine Liberation Organization has lost this role, specifically in the context of confronting external aggression on the ground and deciding whether to confront or not. This brings to mind that “whoever does not do his role loses his status.” This applies to the leadership of the organization and the Fatah movement, which no longer has the ability or a plan for the unity of the Palestinian land and people, the

unity of the Palestinian factions, to repel the daily Israeli attacks or to start and calm the confrontation with the occupation. The organization, whose leadership and representative bodies rarely meet (such as the Palestinian National Council, which has not met in a real regular session since 1991 except once (in 2018)), and thus is gradually losing the role of leading the Palestinian action. It is clear as the negotiations with the “ Hamas” movement have begun that “It goes beyond the Fatah movement and the PLO.”

On the other hand, the Hamas movement does not have the power of legal representation, or the decision to control the rhythm of street movement in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and if it could be a de facto authority in the Gaza Strip, the Strip and its authority in it remain besieged, threatened, and do not meet the daily needs of the people.

Therefore, the Palestinians lack effective and legitimate authority. The responsibility behind this reality could be put on three elements, the first of which is the occupation, the second of which is internal division, and the third, linked to the division, which is the zero-sum mentality, which does not see or accept the national other, or is afraid of it.

(7) For more information, see: Ahmed Jamil Azm, Jenin Brigade and Areen Al-Usood: The New Fedayeen, New Arab, August 24, 2022.

Fourth: Zero-sum internal relations versus external pragmatism

If the Palestinian leadership has neither shown nor presented any plans to mobilize the Palestinian ranks, such as calling for the convening of the Palestinian National Council or arranging a meeting for all Palestinian factions and forces, both inside and outside the PLO, and if it has clarified (as seen in the Fatah statement above) that Hamas's unilateral decision to confront is followed by not consulting on internal political matters, then this, in fact, expresses a stance against coordination with Hamas. However, Hamas's position does not seem fundamentally different, as Hamas also has a high sensitivity and has its own opinion regarding the role of the PA.

There is evidence that both parties view their relationship as a zero-sum game, meaning that any political gain achieved by one party appears to be a loss to the other, and vice versa. In this perspective, every loss is considered a gain for the other, but with some exceptions, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization's refusal to accuse Hamas of terrorism, in United Nations resolutions and in some consultative meetings.

Hamas has shown flexibility and openness towards various Arab and international parties,

but it has been strict in rejecting any role for the Palestinian Authority and its agencies in the Gaza Strip, except for services typically provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Health or the Water Authority. An example of this is the delivery of aid to the Gaza Strip during the war. Hamas did not express opposition or take a clear stance on a U.S. project to establish a new maritime floating port in Gaza for aid delivery. Mohammad Nazzal, a Hamas leader, said in an interview with Al Jazeera that the port is a "vague project," and that a final position would be determined after questions about the port's location, management, and aid reception are answered. At the same time, Hamas showed significant tension regarding the Palestinian Authority, specifically the Palestinian intelligence agency led by Majid Faraj, supervising the delivery of food aid to Gaza.



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In early April, Hamas announced in a statement from the Ministry of Interior that "several officers and soldiers from the General Intelligence Service in Ramallah infiltrated the northern Gaza area on an official mission ordered directly by Majid Faraj. Their aim was to create confusion and chaos within the internal front, with support from the Israeli Shin Bet and the enemy's army, following an agreement reached between the two parties during a meeting in an Arab capital last week." Palestinian Authority sources denied this claim, noting that thousands of security personnel have been living in Gaza since before the 2006/2007 split. It turned out that the actual intention was to deliver food aid to Gaza by personnel already active in Gaza.⁽⁸⁾

The Palestinian Authority in Ramallah issued a statement saying, "The statement from what is called the Hamas Ministry of Interior regarding the entry of aid into the Gaza Strip yesterday is baseless, and we will continue to provide all necessary

relief to our people." In reality, Hamas clarified in their statement about this incident the principle they operate by, which is that "security personnel and armed faction fighters have received instructions to treat any forces entering Gaza without coordination as 'occupying forces'."

Many international aid deliveries enter Gaza, likely without coordinating with Hamas. However, this incident reveals the zero-sum nature of the relationship. The Palestinian security forces in the West Bank did not seek to coordinate with Hamas to deliver much-needed aid to Gaza amidst starvation, nor is Hamas willing to accept any role for the Authority in Gaza that does not go through them.

Finally, it is not true that any of the Palestinian factions are qualified to officially and practically lead the Palestinian public. It is not true that Hamas is on the path to lead the Palestinian people, similar to how Fatah led the militant struggle after 1967 when Ahmad Shuqayri stepped down. Currently, there is no mechanism for rotating or redistributing leadership roles or popular institutions. Fatah has a massive

(8) See: Two officers from the intelligence service were killed during a mission to secure aid in northern Gaza, *Dunya Al-Watan*, April 1, 20024.
<https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/20241538995/01/04/.html>

organization, with internationally accepted bodies and organizations affiliated with it, despite the internal crises, inactivity, and lack of renewal these bodies are experiencing, and despite the Israeli siege imposed on them.

At the same time, the continuation of the occupation means the continuation of resistance and makes the emergence of “waves” of struggle movements and uprisings, similar to the uprising of 2015/2016, or the independent resistance groups of the Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nablus Brigades, and the October 7th operation, inevitable. This inevitable resistance lacks a unified leadership or a coalition front that brings together the different factions, which makes the Palestinian political movement’s ability to translate resistance into a political achievement less probable.

Hence, the primary task in changing the reality of Palestinian action lies in ending

the zero-sum relationship between factions and agreeing on a mechanism that makes the principle of “resistance sows and politics harvests” feasible. This includes agreeing on the type of resistance and its mechanisms and presenting a unified voice to the world. Additionally, it involves establishing new foundations for a Palestinian political system, and foundations for Palestinian action, and reforming its institutions. In the near future, the Palestinian division does not seem likely to end. Hamas remains in control of the Gaza Strip, even if the war weakens its military strength and authority there. Conversely, the Palestinian Authority does not appear to have a vision for achieving unity and establishing a unified Palestinian leadership in the near term. While this situation may not last forever—especially considering the activism of new Palestinian generations in both Palestine and the diaspora—change does not seem imminent.

Is the United States Coming or Going?

Strategic and Tactical Contradictions of the United States Approach to the Middle East

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American policy is full of contradictions. Those contradictions have become especially evident since the war in Gaza began, but they emerged before. The contradictions make the United States a confusing actor, one subject to different strategic impulses and displaying enormous tactical inconsistency. For day-to-day and even year-to-year decision-making, the United States is likely to continue to act confusingly. But in the long run, those contradictions are likely to be managed in a way that means a lessening American interest in the Middle East.

Four contradictions, Global and Regional.

The first contradiction is internal. The United

States appears to have entered an era of political polarization in its politics, and that polarization appears to have expressed itself not only in debates about internal political matters (immigration, the economy, identity politics) but also in global affairs (the war in Ukraine, relationship with China, policy toward Iran). Under the last four American presidents (Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden) the United States seems torn between very different conceptions of its interests and its role in the world; American leaders seem to have a contradictory strategic vision.

But the second contradiction suggests that the first one may be a bit less severe than

it seems. Those four presidents speak very differently from each other when addressing foreign policy issues but there is an underlying direction from the ambitious and aggressive globalism of Bush to the more modest approach of Obama to the “belligerent minimalism” (as my colleague Marc Lynch describes it) of Trump, to the rediscovery of multilateralism of Biden. The abusive and bellicose rhetoric of Trump masks some important continuities in terms of the downscaling of United States security commitments and the greater reluctance for the United States to lead international responses to global crises. And yet rather than develop a clear strategic approach, the United States reacts to each crisis that emerges in an ad hoc manner that makes it difficult to predict.

Taking the first two contradictions together, the result is that strong polarization in the United States expresses itself on specific issues (for instance, on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, pursued by Obama and abandoned by Trump) but much less in long-term trends toward a scaling down of United States security commitments and even diplomatic involvement.

But there is a third contradiction involving United States policy toward Israel and Palestine. On the one hand, there is a strong tie to Israel that has traditionally been supported across much of the political spectrum in the United States. That tie may have been forged with American recognition of Israel in 1948 but it blossomed fully after the 1967 war.

On the other hand, there is a more recent American commitment to a “two-state” solution. In the last days of the Clinton administration, United States officials took a step they had refused to take in the past: they mentioned support for Palestinian statehood. President George W. Bush followed with a more robust rhetorical commitment to a two-state solution, and none of his successors have repudiated that goal. But their diplomatic efforts to secure it have steadily waned—and under Trump momentarily disappeared.

And there is a further contradiction underlying United States policy on this issue. On the one hand, the United States cooperated in building most elements

of global norms and structures in the twentieth century, including a host of international documents and the United Nations itself. On the other hand, the consistent insistence of the United States is that disputes involving Israel should be managed by direct negotiations between Israel and its neighbors, effectively creating a law-free zone where the Geneva Conventions, the United Nations, and international law are effectively treated as distractions rather than as providing the framework for negotiating rival positions and claims.

The United States and the Gaza War: The Contradictions on Display



And yet rather than develop a clear strategic approach, the United States reacts to each crisis that emerges in an ad hoc manner that makes it difficult to predict.

These four contradictions had clearly emerged long before October 7, 2023 but they have been on remarkably full display and operating at the highest levels since the current war began.

First, there has been sharp partisan division over the war. It is not merely between right and left, however, but generational as well. The Biden Administration fully supported Israel at first and has vetoed any attempts to impose a cease-fire. But it has also tried to signal to younger and progressive forces that it is actually working to restrain Israel's harshest actions and provide humanitarian relief. And it has been attacked by some for being insufficiently supportive of Israel and by others for enabling a war on Palestinians as a people.

Second, the Biden Administration came into office explicitly warning that the ground would not support any diplomatic initiative designed to resolve matters between Israel and Palestine; it also scaled back the American security commitment in the region, most notably by completing the withdrawal from Afghanistan. But on October 7, suddenly an activist impulse erupted, with the president

taking an unprecedented trip to the region during active warfare, and his administration devising an ambitious regional plan not merely to aid Israel in defeating Hamas but also in reconstructing Palestinian politics and securing normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Third, the Biden Administration has fully embraced the two elements of American policy it inherited—strong support for Israel and rhetorical commitment to a two-state solution—as if the two could be combined somehow. With an Israeli coalition that is united in its opposition to a two-state solution, and indeed with many Israeli leaders seeing the war as an opportunity to bury the idea and even to cease dealing with Palestinians as a national group, the United States has given only a general outline of how it plans to secure Israel's security, a Palestinian state, and regional peace—and the approach seems more like a prayer than a policy to most seasoned analysts.

Finally, the Biden Administration has maintained the approach of mouthing general invocations to observing international law but effectively treating Palestine as

Guantanamo—a place where law does not apply and formal structures, from the United Nations to the International Criminal Court, should not play much of a role. As Israel has launched an effort to disqualify United Nations bodies (and even disband the United Nations Relief Works Agency) the Biden Administration has been fairly quiet. But while it eschews formal structures, the Biden approach has actually been unusually multilateral, working with Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Rather than monopolizing diplomacy as it has sometimes done in the past, the United States has worked to diminish regional differences and manage a multilateral effort to tame the fighting and bring about a postwar settlement.

Short-Term Incoherence but Long-Term Coherence

The incoherence of United States policy over the short term is quite clear: it is committed to leadership and downsizing, to close relations with an annexationist Israeli government and to a Palestinian state, to Israeli security defined in unlimited terms and to Palestinian rights, and to unilateral action and multilateral coordination.

Of course, if the United States secures the release of Israeli hostages, the destruction of Hamas's military and governing capabilities, a "revitalized" Palestinian Authority and then a Palestinian state, Gulf financing for Gaza reconstruction, and full diplomatic relations between leading Arab states and Israel, it will have won a diplomatic lottery. But those in Las Vegas gambling their savings have better odds. The most likely outcome would seem to be a decimated, traumatized, and embittered Palestinian population, an Israeli leadership split between a center that is satisfied with the outcome and a

right-wing that sees it as an opportunity for annexation and even expulsion of Palestinians, and a deep sense in many regional societies that the United States has supported a war with horrific consequences.

There will be costs associated with such an outcome, most of all a situation in Israel/Palestine resistant to diplomacy but friendly to bloody conflict in many different forms; a divided region; and a pervasive sense in some quarters that the United States is a force for injustice.



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But those short-term results and attendant costs should not be allowed to obscure an underlying trend: the moment after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iraq war of 1990 and 1991 is not only definitively over but the United States is both unable and uninteresting in restoring it. Ever since the collapse of the Oslo Process in 2000 and the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the idea that the United States could lead to a new regional order has receded. All sorts of trends—domestic opposition in the United States from both left and right; disillusionment at the

results of American overreach in Iraq and Afghanistan; the seemingly insoluble nature of Israeli-Palestinian violence; the rise of regional powers; the emergence of other global challengers that seem more ominous long term (including China especially but also Russia); and the unreliability of American leadership point in a different direction. The Gaza War of 2023-2024 will not be remembered like the 1956 Suez war is remembered for

Britain (as a spectacular end to decades of imperial domination). But neither will it reverse the slow long-term trend to a region where the United States no longer aspires to grand ideas but instead pursues more limited interests, enjoys a more limited security presence, and remains diplomatically active without being dominant.

Jordanian Diplomacy and the War on Gaza Amid Shifting Dynamics

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The war on Gaza between Israel and Palestinian resistance groups mainly Hamas since October 2023 has seriously threaten Jordan's national interests as well as relations with Israel in ways not seen at least since 1994 when Amman and Tel Aviv signed their peace treaty. Prior to October 7th relations between both countries witnessed ups and downs and were tense in particular with successive Israeli governments led by Netanyahu and his far rights partners. Jordan, led by his majesty King Abdullah II, has consistently warned in recent years of the potential explosion in the Palestinian territories because of the absence of peace, and systematic Israeli suppressive and oppressive measures

against Palestinians. However, Jordan a country that believes firmly in peace has relentlessly attempted along with the concerned regional and international parties to create conducive conditions that could lead to a meaningful peace process between Palestinians and Israelis as seen in the Aqaba and Sharm El-Sheikh summits prior to the eruption of the Gaza War.

Jordan's Early Prediction of the Current Escalation and its Position

Jordan had foresaw the Gaza event before it happened on October 7th. The warnings and statements made by his majesty the King consistently cautioned against the potential consequences.

Weeks before the eruption of the War in a speech delivered by the King during the UN General assembly annual meetings in September 2023 he clearly warned and anticipated that the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories under the Israeli occupation would result in a vicious cycle of violence. This visionary outlook reflects a deep Jordanian understanding of the different dynamics of the Palestinian issue. One could easily claim that Amman is the closest party to this issue and the one that understands it better. Jordan has always sought to understand and predict Israeli behavior and has demonstrated a high capability in doing so.

Due to this foresight, Jordan's strategy from the very beginning anticipated that Israel's war against Gaza would be prolonged. Therefore, Jordan has taken a sharp and firm position against what Tel Aviv is doing in Gaza, advocated for the protection of Palestinian civilians in the Strip, sent humanitarian aid, sought immediate permanent ceasefire and to create a meaningful path for the resumption of peace talks on the

bases of two states solution. Moreover, the specter of forced displacement of Palestinians from their land by the far-right Israeli government and the possibility of a second Nakba were very real concerns.

Since October 2023 Jordan has followed a very active approach to foreign policy where the King invested huge diplomatic efforts towards important regional and foreign capitals and their leaders particularly concerned Arab parties, Western leaders and most importantly US President Joe Biden whom he met at the White House after October 7. Since the eruption of the war, Jordan has actively



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and effectively participated in every regional and international conference, summit and diplomatic encounters to mobilize support for Amman's position, ending the war and find a pathway for peace. Actually the King was among the first international leaders to label Israel's inhuman actions in the Gaza Strip as "war crimes". Moreover, Jordan was the first country to airdrop aid to Gaza and Amman has become a major hub for joint air operations for the delivery of additional aid.

Although, Jordan has navigated safely numerous issues and challenges in the past, the events of October 7th were distinct in terms of timing, the scale of

the catastrophe, and the reactions from the Jordanian public and political forces. This combination has exerted significant pressure on Jordan. The developments over the past seven months, which have altered the reality of the Palestinian issue and generated multiple security as well as political challenges compelled Jordan to respond.

Raising the Bar of State Rhetoric Escalated the Bar of Aspirations

Many believes that the state hawkish stance concerning the war and Israel, has raised high expectations from the public and created the impression that Amman on a serious collision course with Tel Aviv. Certainly, the Palestinian issue is one of the most important concerns for Jordan. However, from my perspective and Jordan is a country known to be a rational actor, it cannot present itself as a single-issue country while ignoring the complexity of its different national interests. The conflict is not limited to the Palestinians and Israelis only, it is a complex regional and international conflict of a multiparty nature. Consequently, it is not an issue that one



Jordan is a country known to be a rational actor, it cannot present itself as a single-issue country while ignoring the complexity of its different national interests

party can manage on its own. Therefore, probably this necessitates that Jordan's official position be characterized by greater rationality and logic. In its well-balanced policy, Jordan should avoid raising expectations by giving the impression that it can do everything.

On the international arena level, the war on Gaza has clearly exposed the complexities of the Palestinian issue in global politics, highlighting double standards and the American monopoly of the peace process, as well as fragmented Palestinian domestic politics, Israeli troubled domestic politics and the inter-Arab disintegrated politics, all present a serious dilemma to Jordan.

Certainly, the elevated tone of the official discourse is due to the Israeli brutal war on Gaza and to the Jordanian public protests and reactions which has created pressure on the government. However, one could suggest that the above-mentioned structural limitations dictates that Amman should reconsider its position and instead maintain a balancing act policies characterized

by pragmatism and rationality so as to safeguard its national interests. Interests that are linked to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, strategic partnership with US and the West, and with its key Arab strategic partners.

Jordan and the “ Hamas Question ”

Since the ousting of the movement from in 1999, relations between Hamas and Amman remained inactive and characterized with coldness, however, back door channels remained opened. However, the eruption of the War on Gaza triggered questions about viability and necessity of resuming relations between both parties. Nevertheless, nothing serious has changed in their bilateral relations. Yet, after eight months of military confrontation that generated unprecedented destruction and loss of life in the Strip both parties particularly Hamas is facing a serious dilemma. There is an increasing belief among many parties at the regional and international level that Hamas rule in Gaza should end and the Palestinian National Authority in Ramallah should govern the Strip. Under such political

and military pressure, one would suggest that Hamas is currently in a predicament as it realizes that matters in Gaza have changed dramatically and they will not be the same as before 7 October, whether in terms of governance or its popularity in the Strip. Some reports have suggested that the prospects of losing its governance and influence in Gaza, the movement is looking for alternative arenas where it can establish a foot hold, like in Jordan for instance.

The movement believes that it enjoys a great sympathy among the Jordanian public. Moreover, there exists an ideological and organizational link between Hamas and the Muslim

Brotherhood in Jordan which could be used for the benefit of Hamas and therefore, it is in the interest of the movement, as well as the interest of its supporters, to have a presence there. This makes Jordan, in other words, the most suitable arena for challenging Israel. The abovementioned scenario, which is from my perspective seem impossible, has been validated by provocative statements and rhetoric made by some Hamas leaders encouraging Jordanians to intensify their public protests and even to cross the borders into Palestine. This was met with strong rejection and condemnation by the Jordanian government, besides great segments of the Jordanians as well as many social and political groups.



Although Jordan tacitly recognizes the movement as part of the Palestinian political and religious groups, one would not anticipate any profound change in the relation between Amman and Hamas.

Although Jordan tacitly recognizes the movement as part of the Palestinian political and religious groups, one would not anticipate any profound change in the relation between Amman and Hamas. Therefore, Jordan's position towards the movement in the future is subject to Amman's national interests and political changes within the domestic Palestinian

politics as well as how far Hamas would change pragmatically. I believe that even if Hamas was to survive the current War with Israel, it would emerge with deep injuries and weak. Therefore, the movement's options are very limited either to become political pragmatic group, dismantle its military wing and join PLO which Amman has recognized officially since 1974 or go underground and continue its military resistance.

Jordan's Possible Options Amid Current Transformations

The current Gaza War and its ramifications raises many questions and speculations about a range of issues in relation to Amman's national interest, such as the relationship with the United States and who would be the next American president. relationship with Israel amidst the existing political tension with Jordan, alongside certain ongoing regional developments, such as the Arab-Israeli normalization efforts.

Despite uneasy relations with Israel, the United States full-fledged support for Tel Aviv, and the possibility of Donald Trump

returning to the White House leadership, Amman's relationship with the United States is inherently strategic. Jordan as a rational actor where its behavior has been determined by its geopolitical rational, including its national interests, does not have the luxury to abandon this long standing strategic relationship with the US. The latter is probably the most important country in the web of Jordan's vast regional and international relations. Both countries have forged their historical and strategic relations on the bases of their mutual interests where the US is considering Jordan as one of its trusted partners and allies. Speaking of the Palestinian issue including current Gaza War, it is arguably true that one of the factors in Jordan's management of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been the historical strategic relationship with the United States who has been playing a dominant role in the conflict as well as peace efforts to solve it. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that Jordan's relations with the US can be described as deeply rooted and it stands on firm ground that transcends the ups and downs as well as different dynamics

of the American domestic politics. Therefore, we must take the Jordanian-American relationship in its overall context, and thus the issue of a strategic confrontation in the event of Donald Trump's return is unlikely. Jordan has experience in dealing with the United States, and it is not in Jordan's interest at this time to move away from the US even if Trump was to be elected again. This view was observable during Trump's first term where Jordan has tried to understand and accommodate Trump, as summarized by King Abdullah II in the saying, "We are in strategic relations with the United States, but we agreed that we differ on the Palestinian issue." However, if Biden would be elected for a second term, which is highly likely, it is expected that we would witness further development and cooperation between the two countries over issues of common interest and intensifying of their peace efforts to find a meaningful path way to solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Jordan's relationship with Israel, despite the complexity of the situation and the stubbornness of the Israeli side,

it is not expected that there will be a strategic collision between them. Since 1994 both sides have continued to show interest in keeping their peace working despite some violations and provocative measures from the Israeli side particularly in Jerusalem Holy places where Amman has maintained custody over them. Many in Israel, including military and security establishments believes in the centrality and importance of Jordan to Palestinian question and the security of Tel Aviv. Moreover, taking into consideration the widely acknowledged belief that 7 October and its ramifications is going to shake up Israeli domestic politics, where one would expect to see the disappearance of Netanyahu from the political scene, to be replaced by a rational Israeli leader. Even if he was to survive the implications of this war, he will likely emerge with deep wounds and weak.

Jordan's relations with the Arab countries particularly with Egypt and the Gulf States, these relations would continue to function within their strategic context and likely to be developed

regardless of what sometimes appears that Amman may have some differences with these countries. The active and effective diplomacy that Jordan has been pursuing during the ongoing war in Gaza in close coordination with the concerned Arab parties, mainly Egypt and Gulf countries has confirmed and enhanced the centrality of Amman's role in inter-Arab politics. Jordan, led by his majesty King Abdullah II has attended and actively participated in every conference, summit and diplomatic encounters related to the Gaza War. Therefore, an overall assessment to Amman's relations with these countries would suggest they are cordial and of a strategic nature especially with Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Palestinians.

It is noteworthy to suggest that this inter-Arab coordination provides legitimacy and support to Jordan's stance even in dealing with the US and Israel. It is crucial to continue such active engagement with these relevant Arab countries.

October 7th has changed the political landscape of the region and imposed

new equations on the concerned parties including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States. For instance, it impacted the trilateral strategic dialogue between Al-Riyadh, Washington, D.C and Tel Aviv prior to the war on Gaza that would normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel in addition to bilateral Saudi-American issues, where Palestinians and Jordan were not part of



Jordan has experience in dealing with the United States, and it is not in Jordan's interest at this time to move away from the US even if Trump was to be elected again

the dialogue. The eruption of the war in Gaza has confirmed the fact that if peace and normalization were to be achieved one would need Palestinians and Jordan to be part of such a wider arrangement. This has already been seen in the form of the Sixth Arab committee that comprises Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and the Palestinians. This group

has been engaging actively with the US in joint diplomatic efforts, in order to create favorable conditions to ending the war and starting a meaningful peace process. Today, the picture has become more comprehensive, and Jordan has a more prominent role. Gaza confirmed that there is no skipping over Jordan's role, or the Palestinians, even in the stage of arranging the day after the war on Gaza. In the best case scenarios, each party will understand the necessity of Jordan's role to aid in achieving a settlement.

Is There a Need to Reconsider Jordan's Hawkish Position Towards Israel?

The centrality of the Palestinian Question within Jordan's domestic politics as well as its foreign policy is not something new. Actually it is a given fact that resonates with Amman's national interests and simply because of geographical, social as well as political proximity. As a rational actor and small state, Jordan's behavior is governed by its geopolitical rational and the complexity of the Arab-Israel conflict including the Palestinian question. Jordan has been firmly advocating a peaceful solution

on the basis of international legitimacy. Amman had Joined the larger Arab-Israel peace process in 1991 and eventually concluded peace treaty with Israel in October 1994. Since then the nature of their relations could suggested that their relations has witnessed fluctuation. However, an analysis of the history of this relationship one would easily claim that Jordan's relations with Israel, particularly with governments headed by Netanyahu at least since 2011 were always tense. However, the War on Gaza and Israel's systematic illegal practices, massive and deliberate killing of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank as well as unprecedented destruction of the Strip, has compelled Jordan to take a very hard and hawkish position against Tel Aviv. Actually relationship between both parties has never been this tense since 1994 the way they are now.

The Jordanian official position has resonated with the public one. Some even believe that the official position has transcended the public one. The King along with his aids and other officials have kept harshly criticizing what Israel

is doing in the Strip and in the West Bank. Moreover, The Kingdom took certain diplomatic measures such as asking the Israel Ambassador to Jordan to leave the country. Furthermore, Amman went further when it considered the possibility of forced displacement of the Palestinians from the West Bank to Jordan by Israel as a red line that would compel Amman to contemplate war with Tel Aviv.

As the war on Gaza has proceeded and the tone of the official Jordanian position has continued to be hawkish, this actually has created a covert as well as overt debate among political and intellectuals in Jordan. Some (conservatives) believe that from a realpolitik perspective, Jordan should reconsider its hard position and instead adapt a more rational position that takes into consideration its national interests and its structural limitations when it comes to influencing the pace of events on the Palestinian issue as well as relations with Israel. Jordan is not a super-regional power that can present itself as the one who can shoulder the burden of such a complex issue of a multiparty

nature. Moreover, Jordan should not be perceived as a single issue country (that is the Palestinian issue). Rather Amman has many issues and challenges that are also impacting its national interests including the association with the Palestinians, challenges from its geographical neighborhood, relations and shared interests with its regional and international strategic partners. Addition this hard position is raising high expectations on the part of the public and eventually that the state would become a hostage to the public position, which is mostly emotionally driven. The state in reality cannot go on a serious collision course with Israel. It could jeopardize its interests including relations with US and other supporters of Israel. Therefore, Amman needs to recalibrate its position with fine tuning and constant care to safe guard its own concerns.

On the other hand, some within the Jordanian political and social elites strongly supports Amman's hard position towards Israel. The unprecedented and savage war on Gaza is directly

threatening Jordanian national interests and that Jordan has a moral, religious as well as political responsibilities towards the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Moreover, the proponents and advocates of Jordan's hawkish stance argue that, in doing so Amman is defending itself from the Zionists ambitions of Netanyahu and his right wingers' allies. Many radical figures within Israel have always advocated the notion of "Land of Israel" that includes Jordan.

One could argue that both camps are relatively right. This debate reveals the dilemma that Jordan has been facing since the eruption of the war that is impacting its domestic politics as well as its demographical make up.

This imposing a set of burdens on Jordan, the most important of which is the urgent need to strengthen and enhance the domestic front. To achieve this, the Jordanian state today needs to steer the public position in accordance with its national interests, and engage good, trusted politicians – politicians

who possess the moral and ethical foundation that cannot be questioned. Moreover, there should be a balancing act between Jordan's principles, moral and political responsibilities towards the Palestinians, and its own national interests the way other concerned parties are doing, like Egypt and the Gulf States.

Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that the War on Gaza is a game changer to the international politics of the Middle East, mainly to different dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It brought back the Palestinian Question to the center stage of regional as well as international politics. Moreover, the War has generated multiple challenges to the region as well as direct threats to Jordan's national interests. Therefore, Amman proactive diplomacy in response to this war emanates from its principles as well as its national strategic interests. Moreover, managing the war and eventually de-escalating it, and resolving the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain Amman's top priority goal.

After 8 months of war on Gaza, Jordan as a rational actor, should review its position regarding what happened, implications of the war, and debated ideas, scenarios and proposals by the concerned parties. It is essential to strive to understand Jordan's role in post-Gaza, both at the regional and Palestinian contexts. Intensive efforts should be made to educate the Jordanian public that, Jordan as a state is defending its national interests including Palestinian question within the capacity of its power and structural limitations and does not officially present itself as an alternative to the Palestinians. Jordan must contribute significantly to strengthening official Palestinian structures PLO and PNA, and promote what is called the independence of the national palestinian institutions.

No one could deny the existence of special bonds between Jordan and Palestinians, but after the events of 1964, 1974, 1988, Oslo Accords, and other subsequent development , there is an official independent palestinian reality. Today, there are common ties, but with Jordan's assertiveness in its stance, there is a fear of creating a perception that Jordan is a substitute for the Palestinian official structures and raising expectations. Evidence of this is seen in the raising of expectations by the Jordanian public, demanding more and more from Jordan.

Ultimately, there are strategic Jordanian interests that cannot be compromised like its national security and survivability, and the Jordanian state has fundamental principles that determine its position on this matter.

The Relations with the Palestinians from the Perspective of Jordanian National Security

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The war on Gaza necessarily casts a heavy shadow on Jordanian policies, both domestically and internationally. However, more importantly, this war raises a series of fundamental questions that indeed require deep thinking and thorough discussion among decision-makers, as well as among Jordanian intellectual and political elites, to answer them. This is due to what the coming days might hold in terms of scenarios and possibilities at the strategic level related to the future of the Palestinian cause, the peace settlement, the fate of the two-state solution, and other issues that, with the war on Gaza, seem to be taking on a global dimension due to the level of international attention and focus on them. Needless to say, it is even more evident that they have a profound and significant impact on Jordanian strategic calculations as well.

Necessarily, there are new questions and inquiries about the repercussions of the war on Gaza. However, on the other hand, there are old-new questions that are still stuck in framing and defining the Jordanian-Palestinian relations, especially from the perspective of Jordanian national security. Hence, what we seek to discuss here is: What does Jordan want from the Palestinians, especially in the West Bank and Jerusalem? And what do the Palestinians want or expect from Jordan in the future? Such a question is linked to other important questions that complement it in defining the conceptual framework that is supposed to

form a determinant for understanding the links and relations between the two parties. When answering the posed questions, the most important of which are: Where does the West Bank lie in defining Jordan's security and vital interests at the present time? And how can the Jordanian position towards the Palestinian issue develop according to either the ideal scenario, the current scenario, or even the worst scenario?

Perhaps these questions later imply a set of questions that are supposed not to be left without objective and logical discussion; such as: What are the positive reinforcements for Jordanian-Palestinian relations? And why do many Jordanians and Palestinians feel apprehensive at the mere proposition of a scenario of a "formula" for a possible future relationship between the two parties? What are the common interests? What are the common sources of threat? And what are the bilateral sources of threat between the two parties that threaten their relationship?

1.A brief background on the controversy of Jordanian-Palestinian relations

Since King Abdullah II assumed power, the Jordanian strategic approach towards the Palestinian issue has stabilized on a set of

clear basic principles, foremost of which is The establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state on the pre-1967 borders is a Jordanian strategic interest. This vision also included that Palestine is for the Palestinians and Jordan is for the Jordanians, including the refusal to establish any kind of relationship between Jordan and Palestine except after the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state, and that this relationship should be based on the will of the two peoples and not imposed, whether internally or externally.

Such an approach represented a qualitative development in the Jordanian strategic perspective towards the Palestinian issue. The relationships remained intertwined and interconnected between the two sides, whether before the union between Jordan and the West Bank in 1950 or even after that, up until the Rabat Summit, which recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. This was followed by the decision to disengage from the West Bank in 1988, and later the signing of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. However, there was always ongoing debate about the nature of this relationship, whether between Haj Amin

al-Husseini in an earlier period and King Abdullah I, or between King Hussein bin Talal and Yasser Arafat. The debate extended to the position of the Arab regional system on the unity of the two banks (it is known that only Britain, Pakistan, and Iraq recognized it). The problem then moved to the Jordanian interior through the relationship between revolutionary Palestinian organizations and the Jordanian regime in the 1960s, which led to the events of September 1970, where Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, as is well known, supported the Fedayeen in those confrontations with the Jordanian army.

Despite the decision of disengagement from the West Bank and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, there remained doubts and questions about the future of the relationship, especially since King Hussein, as many of his confidants narrate, felt bitterness that the West Bank and the Al-Aqsa Mosque were occupied during the Jordanian rule, and he wished to have a leading role in the process of regaining them. Moreover, the issue of mistrust of the Jordanian role and ambitions remained unresolved. Furthermore, King Hussein's vision of foreign policy was expansionist, viewing that the strategic value of Jordan's regional role was largely linked to the Palestinian cause, given its important global and

international dimensions. It is also known that during King Hussein's era, and throughout the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jordan's strategic position was a key variable in shaping the government's financial balance, through substantial aid from Arab countries. Jordan was also able to play a balanced role between its position with the Palestinians and its open and strong network of relations with the West, particularly U.S. administrations, and backdoor channels with a number of Israeli leaders.

In conclusion, King Abdullah II came in the year 1999, and with him a new, completely different perception of the relationship with Palestine. He redesigned the Jordanian perspective according to the previously mentioned rules. Rather, he worked to pay attention to internal affairs - in the beginning - and raise remarkable slogans in this field that reflect the difference between the two perspectives; like "Jordan First" and "We (all) are Jordan". He went towards focusing on socio-economic transformation through a liberal economic program based on strengthening the private sector, investment, and strengthening relations with the Arab Gulf states. In fact, at one point, the issue of "Jordan's accession to the Gulf Cooperation Council" was even raised during the reign of

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia.

2. Analysis of the current situation; common interests and sources of threat and challenge

The war on Gaza may seem to have revived the talks about the peace process once again, especially after the emergence of Arab and International approaches suggesting a decline in the importance of the Palestinian cause. This was coupled with the idea of a regional peace (during the tenure of President Donald Trump) that is based on building an interwoven regional system of economic and political interests between Arab countries and Israel, regardless of whether the Palestinian issue is resolved or not. On this new basis, the Abraham Accords for normalization between Arab countries and Israel were concluded. In fact, negotiations for normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel were on the verge of completion on the eve of the October 7, 2024 operation, which reshuffled the deck. After that, the strategic and political momentum for the Palestinian issue returned, and many Western countries began speaking again about the importance of resuming the peace process and establishing and recognizing a Palestinian state. As can be seen from the statements of many Arab officials, especially the Saudis, they now seem to be giving greater importance to the Palestinian cause in the

normalization negotiations with Israel.

These important and strategic developments stemming from October 7th and the war on Gaza are still in the process of unfolding and taking shape, and there are no practical or precise indicators as to where they may lead. There are still major questions and inquiries about the formula for a Palestinian state that the Palestinians and Israelis could accept (which is the most important question and remains so, and perhaps it is – as we will clarify later – the one that clashes the most with Jordan’s perspective on its national security)? What is the formula that the Palestinians could accept regarding the



viewing that the strategic value of Jordan’s regional role was largely linked to the Palestinian cause, given its important global and international dimensions. It is also known that during King Hussein’s era, and throughout the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jordan’s strategic position was a key variable in shaping the government’s financial balance, through substantial aid from Arab countries.

issues of Jerusalem, borders, the right of return, and Palestinian land? What formula could the US administration put forward, whether President Joseph Biden remains or former President Donald Trump returns to the White House? And what is the strategic agenda of the Israeli right-wing with regard to the issue of a Palestinian state? All of these are highly important questions because they will shape the future of the Palestinian cause on one hand, and the formula of Jordanian-Palestinian relations on the other.

Returning to Jordan's position during the war on Gaza, we find that there was a significant escalation in Jordan's stance against Israeli aggression. Jordanian diplomacy was in a state of near-confrontation with the Israelis. Jordan's position primarily centered around the necessity of halting the Israeli aggression

on Gaza, protecting civilians and delivering humanitarian aid, and warning of the catastrophic consequences of the war. On the level of Jordan's national security, what was prominent was Jordan's solid rejection of any mass transfer of West Bank residents to the Jordanian borders, considering it a "declaration of war" by Israel, as Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi stated. This was affirmed by Prime Minister Bishr Al-Khasawneh when he considered the displacement of Palestinians to be a structural violation of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty.

If we go beyond the moral and principled aspect of the Israeli war on Gaza, there are striking observations in Jordan's position during the Gaza war phase. The first is the return of the fear of "transfer" to the Jordanian political lexicon, after there was a conviction among a broad trend in the Jordanian political elite that such a matter had been buried and was no longer probable. The second is Jordan's significant escalation and its leading role in the diplomatic confrontation with Israel. So what considerations led Jordan to this escalatory role? Was it the moral-humanitarian aspect? Or was it the internal equation heavily influenced by the repercussions of the war on Gaza? Was it the accumulation of hostile



The main consideration determining Jordan's strategic interests towards the Palestinian issue is embodied in the scenario of the peace settlement and what it will lead to

positions between Netanyahu's government on one side and the Royal Court on the other? Is the answer a combination of all the previous reasons? There is no definitive answer to the previous questions, although there are multiple trends in approaching an answer that vary between those reasons and factors.

3. The next phase; considerations and determinants for formulating a Jordanian national security theory regarding the Palestinian issue and the West Bank

The main consideration determining Jordan's strategic interests towards the Palestinian issue is embodied in the scenario of the peace settlement and what it will lead to. If the process results in the establishment of a Palestinian state in any form, with acceptance from the Palestinians accompanied by international and regional support, then Jordan - in all likelihood - will welcome that and support the Palestinian position. This scenario will represent a clear demarcation of the relations between two independent states, allowing for the development of common interests between them later on, at all levels. It may even be possible to reach a form of "confederal relationship" (like the Gulf Cooperation Council, the European Union, or others). This scenario may represent a logical end to the debate over the relationship between

the two parties, spanning a century, from the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan until today. This will necessarily be reflected in the reorganization of Jordan's internal affairs later, after resolving the Palestinian issue, which had been intertwined with many internal political and economic files.

As for the other scenarios, they are the ones that spark discussion, dialogue, and controversy today, leading to the emergence of differing trends among Jordanian political elites in defining the future relationship between the two sides. Perhaps the question that encapsulates all of this is: What if a Palestinian state is established? What if the security situation in the West Bank deteriorates? What if there is pressure on Jordan to play a certain role in the West Bank in case the security and political conditions deteriorate, or if that is the only way to reach an international-regional deal regarding the Palestinian issue? Stemming from the previous questions and inquiries: Is there an American or Israeli agenda seeking to transfer the political and security burden of dealing with the West Bank file to Jordan? If the Israeli right wing is in control today and does not want to establish a Palestinian state, what are the other options for Jordan? What if there is a major deterioration in the situation in Jerusalem and the Israeli right-

wing implements its project to seize the Al-Aqsa Mosque; what will Jordan do and to what extent can the Jordanian reaction reach? Will it proceed to cancel the peace treaty, or will it stop at the limits of diplomatic confrontation? And what if regional peace projects are resumed in the "day after the war" without solving the Palestinian issue; will Jordan overcome its previous reservations and integrate with the Israelis, or will it remain opposed to them? Or will it integrate into the economic projects while trying to maintain its political position towards the two-state solution?

The title of the previous questions among Jordanian political elites has always been: If the peace settlement fails, what is Jordan's Plan B to deal with the Palestinian issue?

Despite the strategic importance of Jordanian-Palestinian relations at the level of Jordanian security and vital interests, there is not yet a mature consensus vision linked to discussions and studies between state institutions and political elites that defines and frames the concept of Jordanian national security in this issue, which rises - without the slightest discussion - to be the most important file in the Jordanian foreign policy.

On the other hand, there is a clear contrast between major trends - today - among the Jordanian political elites close to the decision-making circles (we exclude here the well-known Islamic, nationalist, and leftist ideological trends) towards the Palestinian issue⁽¹⁾.

The conservative trend believes that Jordan must maintain its current policies, especially before the war on Gaza, be content with supporting the Palestinian National Authority, not be drawn into the escalation with Israel, and maintain a regional and international safety network. It also argues that the Kingdom must avoid entering a phase of isolation because of its diplomatic positions, and it sees that there is a necessity of distinguishing between Jordan's position on Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli right-wing on the one hand, and the relationship with Israel - on the other hand - which includes the deep state, with its political, military and security institutions.

The right-wing perspective believes that Jordan should completely distance itself from

(1) The designations that will be presented later are not completely scientific, but rather related to a preliminary analysis of the political discourse, they require more in-depth studies, and they are based on preliminary observations of the nature of the internal Jordanian controversy and debate regarding the Palestinian file.

the Palestinian issue and avoid, as much as possible, looking westward geographically. Instead, it should focus on the network of strategic interests tied to its relationships with neighboring countries and its economic interests. This approach aims to thwart any attempts or ideas that might "entangle" Jordan in the Palestinian issue while being mindful of the sensitivity of this issue concerning the already delicate demographic-political balance within the country.

The new elite perspective raises more questions than answers on how to deal with the possibility of a Palestinian state not being established, which is more likely today, the escalating confrontation with the Israeli right-wing, and the implicit shift in the strategic perception of many forces in Israel, who have come to see the impossibility of establishing a Palestinian state and linking any new formulas for entities in the West Bank to Jordan. As well as how to deal with the possibility of deteriorating conditions in the West Bank and the spread of Israeli settlements, and how to deal with the issue of Jerusalem, which represents a great symbolic and political value, and its relationship with the Hashemite custodianship has become a matter that cannot be abandoned or relinquished today.

Is it enough for Jordan's reaction to be limited to symbolic support or reiteration of the two-state solution (with diminishing prospects for this option)? Or will it avoid confrontation with Israel, while Jordan realizes that the eventual outcome will be a "transfer of the burden" onto it? This political group thus argues for the necessity of adopting a new approach that can more effectively address and acknowledge the realistic changes, as there are "geostrategic inevitabilities" whether we accept them or not. For Jordan, the most prominent of these is the ongoing debate over the relationship with the Palestinian issue on strategic, daily, political, social, and geographical levels, among others.



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Going over the features of this internal Jordanian debate, as we explained in the previous paragraphs, is only to reinforce the indication of the lack of a consensual vision for a framework for the Jordanian national security, especially with regard to the different possible scenarios of the Palestinian situation. But it is important here to think about the variables and factors that affect the formulation of the Jordanian national security theory (regarding the Palestinian issue) and which stand behind this contrast in the positions of the Jordanian political elites regarding the Palestinian file. Let us classify these variables into two categories:

First, there are variables that reinforce caution in the relationship and tilt the balance toward concerns. These include the historical sensitivities in the relationship with the West Bank (after the experience of the union between the two sides, which lasted 17 years before the occupation and 38 years before the disengagement), defining the stance on the changes occurring in the Israeli political arena (both religious and secular right), and the question regarding the Jordanian national identity. Specifically, it is important to note that a concerning issue for a segment of the Jordanian political elite is the fear of what is called the "alternative homeland" and possibly the "alternative regime." This

concern has long preoccupied the minds of Jordanian political elites and influences their positions on the Palestinian issue, in light of Jordan's internal demographic composition. This particular reason (related to the elite's concern about the question of national identity, which for them means Trans-Jordanian identity) is a major and fundamental factor in shaping the conservative or right-wing internal stance on the Palestinian issue.

Second, Variables of Common Interests and Interconnected Sources of Threat; which tilt the balance towards reviewing the relationship and outlining new conceptions for the future. The most prominent of these variables are the danger of the Israeli right-wing agenda towards Jordan and Palestine, the geo-strategic inevitability in the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship and the interconnectedness of events between the two sides, the importance of political stability in the West Bank for Jordan's national security, and another important variable represented by the great strategic value of the Palestinian file in defining Jordan's regional role.

Conclusion

Given the considerations that govern the different trends among Jordanian elites, the optimal choice is neither to retreat and ignore what is happening west of the river, nor to look only at concerns without interests, or interests without concerns. Instead, multiple perspectives must be used to view the issue, and a Jordanian narrative of national security must be developed. This narrative should integrate the two aforementioned types of variables into a single equation, frame a clear definition of security, interests, and sources of threats, and include concerns as part of the open sources of threats. It should also position regional roles and shared interests as incentives for developing the relationship. In any case, the premise upon which the theory of Jordanian national security should be based is that the West Bank is considered part of the vital area of Jordanian national security.

Especially in light of current realities, the likelihood of establishing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital is unlikely. Therefore, it is improbable that the Palestinians will accept any formula without achieving this. Given the significant increase in settlement numbers and percentages in the West Bank, the clear plans to Judaize Jerusalem, and the lack of a political alternative to the Israeli right, Jordanian national security faces major and complex challenges and questions in this regard. Addressing these requires preparation, thought, and readiness, as the answers entail critical strategic choices and a real crossroads for the future of the state, both internally and externally.

Turkey, Iran, and the Question of Their Future Role

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General Foundational Introduction

When we talk about Turkey and Iran as active regional powers in the Middle East, we are referring to a changing context of regional interactions. The nature of this change stems from how both countries engage with these interactions. The political system in each country, in terms of political ideology, social inputs, and, most importantly, international relations, has imposed different paths and interpretations for each. This becomes evident in their approaches to regional issues. It is essential to note that this reality has not prevented Turkey and Iran from finding themselves within the same regional context, particularly on matters of mutual interest. This has created a complex interplay between interests and ideology in their bilateral relations.

Undoubtedly, Turkey and Iran view their roles in the region differently. Turkey sees itself as a "revisionist" power in the region, driven by a sense of "historical romance" when it comes to its role in the Middle East. As the successor of the Ottoman Empire, which controlled the region for nearly four centuries, the "Neo-Ottomanism" advocated by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan marks a strategic shift in Turkey's foreign policy towards the region and its issues. Despite Turkey's struggles to create a favorable political environment in the region, especially after the Arab Spring, this has not deterred it from seeking to reposition itself strategically within renewed regional and international contexts to protect its interests and influence. The recent rapprochement between Turkey and the Arab Gulf states and

Egypt clearly illustrates the broad margin within which Turkey has begun to operate.

As for Iran, the situation is completely different, as it views itself as a "change" force in the region, a state ruled by a transnational religious ideology, and views the Middle East as a vacuum area that must be filled by the Islamic Revolution, this view imposed on Iran to seek to re-change the shape and balances of the region according to this revolutionary view by interacting with the region's issues politically, militarily, and sometimes "sectarianly", whether through its quest for the success of political models similar to its models, or its quest to form and support armed groups in the region. This view had linked Iran to a large geo-ideological alliance stretching from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean, strategically expressed as the "axis of resistance", such a reality has put Iran in a state of direct clash with many regional and international powers, specifically the United States.

There is no doubt that both states are currently experiencing a complex strategic overlap, imposed by the contexts of the war on Gaza, in terms of how each manages the contexts

of this war and aligns it with their respective regional strategic priorities. This reality has directly influenced the movements of both countries regarding the other countries in the regional system, oscillating between escalation at times, competition at others, and periods of calm.

Examining the nature and future of the role of Turkey and Iran in the regional equation requires a careful pause at the most prominent internal and external variables that contributed to shaping the approach and vision of each of them, and most importantly, how Turkey and Iran view the future that their role in the Middle East should be, and how they will interact with it.



The transition from «intelligence diplomacy,» previously managed by Fidan, to «security diplomacy» in its various dimensions, has become the primary framework through which Ankara will handle regional issues in the future

A New Strategic Approach

It can be said that both Turkey and Iran are currently experiencing a level of ideological consistency in their foreign policy that they have not seen in the past. This consistency has resulted in a unified foreign policy decision-making process and a general agreement on the paths and goals of their foreign policy, without internal complexities hindering the effectiveness of their regional roles.

Regarding Turkey, the features of the new approach, particularly during President Erdoğan's second term, can be outlined as follows:

Centralization of Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Turkey has succeeded in creating a significant centralization in its foreign policy, which is reflected in the appointment of individuals ideologically aligned with President Erdoğan. This includes Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Intelligence Chief İbrahim Kalın. The presence of these figures around President Erdoğan provides a clear picture of the strategic vision guiding Turkey's foreign policy. The appointment of Fidan as Foreign Minister indicates the nature of the approach Ankara will adopt in

the coming period. During his years leading the intelligence agency, Fidan oversaw some of the most sensitive back-channel communications with various regional and international actors and played a prominent role in shaping security and intelligence aspects and arranging reconciliations with adversaries, giving Turkey a significant boost in the region.

Rise of Security Diplomacy: The transition from "intelligence diplomacy," previously managed by Fidan, to "security diplomacy" in its various dimensions, has become the primary framework through which Ankara will handle regional issues in the future. Appointing an intelligence figure as Foreign Minister highlights the importance of the security dimension in Turkish foreign policy. Most of the issues Ankara engages with today are security-related, whether in Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, or even concerning the war in Gaza. This perspective reflects Ankara's focus on balancing security needs with new regional interactions.

Internal Security as a Driver of Foreign Policy: The new approach clarifies that Turkish national security has become the axis around

which Erdoğan operates on the external front, whether in terms of mitigating Turkey's economic problems or confronting the threats posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Syria and Iraq. Despite President Erdoğan winning a second term, the election results showed a clear decline in public support for his previous policies. This prompted President Erdoğan to review some of his foreign policies to better serve his internal policies. It is important to note that this review does not signify a significant policy change but rather a shift from one approach to a less extreme one



The strategy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the region, particularly in the aftermath of the assassination of the former Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani, has focused on continuity and change in its operational methods to bolster its influence in the region. This includes managing the dynamics of de-escalation or escalation with the United States as dictated by the new Iranian reality

that yields more political returns. This likely explains Turkey's recent outreach to the Arab Gulf states and Egypt, or its stance on the war in Gaza, differentiating between condemning Israel for its war on the residents of the Gaza Strip and the importance of maintaining economic relations with it

As for Iran, it is also experiencing similar stability in managing its foreign policy. With the arrival of former Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the political rise of the conservative faction, a rise reaffirmed by the conservative faction's victory in the parliamentary elections recently, Iran has demonstrated clear ideological consistency in foreign policy decision-making. It can be said that Iran's external approach is represented in three main axes:

Unity of Foreign Political Discourse: Raisi's arrival has created unity in the Iranian political discourse directed towards the region. This is one of the main reasons behind Raisi's selection by the conservative faction and the Revolutionary Guard, with the support and endorsement of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The goal was to end the disagreements that emerged during the

tenure of former President Hassan Rouhani, particularly between the presidency and the Revolutionary Guard regarding Iran's regional role, thus presenting the region with a single coherent Iranian policy and discourse, rather than varied and intertwined policies and discourses.

Securing the Revolutionary Guard's Strategy: The strategy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the region, particularly in the aftermath of the assassination of the former Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani, has focused on continuity and change in its operational methods to bolster its influence in the region. This includes managing the dynamics of de-escalation or escalation with the United States as dictated by the new Iranian reality. This approach is evident in Iran's role in Iraq, for example, which is currently managed by influential figures from the IRGC. Alongside Quds Force commander Esmail Qaani, there are significant roles played by Hassan Danaeifar, the head of the Iraq desk at the Iranian Foreign Ministry and a former ambassador to Iraq, who is also a former general in the IRGC. Additionally, the new Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Al Sadeq, is also a former general in the IRGC. Integrating the Foreign Ministry with the

IRGC: The appointment of Hossein Amir-Abdollahian as Foreign Minister during Raisi's presidency marked a significant shift in Iranian strategy. Abdollahian, a prominent figure from the second generation of the revolution, is an experienced diplomat influenced by Soleimani, trusted by the Supreme Leader and the IRGC, and has strong public relations networks with all of Iran's proxies in the region. His appointment to lead the Iranian Foreign Ministry under Raisi was intended to leverage his expertise and connections to support the Revolutionary Guard's efforts in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, balance Qaani's inability to fill Soleimani's void and reorganize Iran's scattered regional policies, thereby restoring the effectiveness of Iran's regional role. Despite Abdollahian's sudden death in a plane crash with Ebrahim Raisi, it can be said that Ali Bagheri Kani, who is acting as the Foreign Minister, comes from the same school of thought as the late minister.

There is no doubt that many political and strategic necessities surrounding Iran led to Raisi's rise to power, prompting Khamenei to place all his hopes on this president and the team accompanying him in state administration.

However, the shocking and unexpected development of Raisi's and Abdollahian's deaths, along with several other officials, will compel the Supreme Leader to seek similar alternatives to continue the policies of the late president and maintain the same ideological approach and discourse.

Turkey, Iran, and the War on Gaza

The roles of Turkey and Iran present a unique model in regional relations. Despite being on opposite sides of most regional conflicts in the Middle East for many years, the two countries have managed to navigate their differences based on the principle of "competitive cooperation." Besides the historical and geopolitical factors that compel them to manage their rivalry, this "competitive cooperation" is grounded in the fact that the surrounding conflicts have imposed shared challenges on them, particularly in Syria and Iraq, regarding the Kurdish issue. However, this has not prevented the emergence of disagreements over other issues. In the Gaza war, the shared opposition of Turkey and Iran to the war created a common ground for both countries to produce a joint approach to the conflict.

Nevertheless, fundamentally, the two countries adopt policies that are not entirely aligned. While Tehran has engaged in the war through its network of proxies in the region and has called for regional countries to sever their economic and diplomatic ties with Israel, Turkey continues to maintain its diplomatic and trade relations with Israel similar to other countries in the region even though it had conditionally halted commercial exchange due to Israel not allowing Turkish aid into Gaza. Additionally, Turkey has opposed the military solution to the war and is actively involved in back-channel diplomacy to halt it.

The ongoing turmoil in the regional policy agenda has necessitated a political review of the external actions of both Turkey and Iran. While Iran is trying to expand its circle of consensus with regional countries, particularly with influential states like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, Turkey has also recently moved to re-normalize relations with these countries. After successfully restoring ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, President Erdoğan recently visited Egypt, addressing one of the major strategic challenges Turkey faced in the region by re-establishing relations with Egypt. However, the main issue lies in the differing

perspectives Turkey and Iran have on this normalization and regional openness.



«maintaining the status quo» may represent the second strategic determinant that Turkey's role could take in the next phase.

Turkey, with its complex internal and regional circumstances, fears significant shifts in power balances after the Gaza war

Turkey views active and dynamic relations with Arab countries as providing a strategic boost forward. This includes achieving more economic benefits for Turkey by increasing Gulf and Arab investments in the country and integrating Turkey into Arab regional policies. This could influence U.S. and Russian policies towards Turkey or position Turkey within Arab calculations in the context of consensus with Iran. Conversely, Iran aims to neutralize these Arab states from Israel's efforts to align them against Iran through its policy of openness towards Arab countries.

Additionally, Iran seeks to create a regional situation that supports its influence by securing the political gains its proxies have achieved in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon.

Both Turkey and Iran recognize the importance of political engagement in the post-Gaza war phase. This is evident from Turkey's understandings with the United States regarding a political solution in the region and its active diplomacy with Iraq to resolve the PKK issue, reflecting Turkey's approach to resolving all crises in preparation for what lies ahead. Similarly, despite the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus in April 2024, Iran refrained from escalating into a war with Israel. Instead, it opted for a limited response rather than an uncalculated regional adventure, based on the principle that maintaining influence is more important than a broad retaliation against Israel.

The Challenge of the Future Role

Discussing the forthcoming roles of both Turkey and Iran represents one of the most prominent debates within both countries, whether at the level of research centers or decision-making circles. Perhaps the reason behind this debate lies in the strategic challenges facing both Turkey and Iran at present. However, it can be

argued that a simple examination of the nature of the foreign moves made by both countries suggests, if not outright confirms, that there has been an intellectual and strategic review that has imposed itself on the reality of Turkish and Iranian roles in the Middle East.

The most significant strategic shift in Turkish foreign thinking is the realistic consideration of the region's transformations and dynamics. This shift entails moving from viewing the region as part of Turkish-Ottoman history to seeing it as part of Turkish-Ottoman culture. This transformation is embodied in the practical retreat from the "Neo-Ottoman" thesis, as President Erdoğan emphasized that the aim of the idea of the "Neo-Ottoman" was to affirm the Ottoman symbolism of the Middle East's geography. He reiterated this in a speech to the Justice and Development Party audience in Ankara when he said, "Aleppo, Misrata, Mosul, and other Ottoman cities may lie outside the borders of the Turkish state, but they are certainly present in our culture and consciousness." Such expression represents a clear abandonment of the "Neo-Ottoman" concept, replaced instead by "Turkish nationalism," which has become the primary determinant of Turkey's role in the Middle East.

In addition to the above, "maintaining the status quo" may represent the second strategic determinant that Turkey's role could take in the next phase. Turkey, with its complex internal and regional circumstances, fears significant shifts in power balances after the Gaza war. Its pursuit of a political solution to this war may represent a Turkish endeavor to maintain current balances without change, specifically in favor of countries like Iran or Israel. Its push for normalizing relations with Arab countries, especially Gulf countries, falls within a Turkish vision of balancing action with capability. Turkey is a country with the action but lacks the capability due to economic and social crises it is going through, while Arab and Gulf countries have the capability but lack action. This explains the recent Turkish-Arab interaction to achieve a kind of strategic integration in the face of Israeli and Iranian assertiveness to shape the post-Gaza war scene.

As for Iran, the post-Soleimani assassination phase imposed significant challenges regionally, especially regarding securing its influence and sustaining its regional momentum. The state of regional and international isolation Iran faced due to the

extreme pressure policies exerted against it by the former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration led to an Iranian conviction of the necessity to leverage the arrival of the Biden administration. Iran saw this as an opportunity to transform areas of influence into a platform through which it could present



The strategy of «in-depth defense» can be considered the main driver of the Iranian role in the next stage, as the success of the United States in removing Soleimani from the Iranian political scene, imposing economic sanctions, and the continuous attacks on Iran's proxies in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon, established the credibility of American deterrence with the Iranian decision-maker

a new image of interaction with the world. Iran adopted a policy of reasonable denial against American presence and engaged in extensive regional agreements with Saudi Arabia. It began to normalize relations with other Arab

countries, signaling a new vision for Iran's role in the Middle East.

The strategy of "in-depth defense" can be considered the main driver of the Iranian role in the next stage, as the success of the United States in removing Soleimani from the Iranian political scene, imposing economic sanctions, and the continuous attacks on Iran's proxies in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon, established the credibility of American deterrence with the Iranian decision-maker, and perhaps this explains the Iranian discipline in not engaging extensively in the Gaza war, fearing that such involvement would lead to major repercussions facing Iran, and therefore Iran is working to maintain escalation levels in order to protect its influence on the one hand, and secure its proxies and allies on the other.

The most significant challenge facing Iran today lies in how the Iranian regime can produce a political approach that balances between "the necessities of survival" and "responding to challenges." Despite attempts by the regime to distance itself from the attacks carried

out by its proxies in the region, there is no doubt that it desires to continue these attacks, as they provide strategic alternatives for the regime, especially amid Iran's fear of direct involvement in a war with Israel at present. However, the continuation of Israeli attacks inside Syria has become a crucial indicator, although not the main reason, of armed conflict looming widely across the region.

The idea of survival is today the greatest concern for the regime in Iran. It represents a strategic value greater than engaging directly in a war with Israel. This idea is not related to the structure of the regime or its main forces but rather to its ideology, regional project, and, most importantly, the future role of the Revolutionary Guards internally and externally. This is an important point to consider when attempting to understand the reasons why Iran is not considering the scenario of regional war, despite the threats and military attrition faced by its proxies in the region.

Conclusions

In addition to all of the above, the regional aspirations of both Turkey and Iran cannot be overlooked, as they strive to dominate the regional scene. Although current regional and international circumstances are not conducive for both countries to achieve the goal of "regional leadership," this does not mean that they will abandon this strategic objective.

It can be said that the war on Gaza has forced both Turkey and Iran to reshape their strategic vision in the region according to calculations of gains and losses. These calculations have compelled both parties to carefully assess their stance on the Gaza war and the importance of securing a significant position in the post-war strategic equation. Each country is attempting to navigate this challenge with minimal losses. The challenges that impose themselves on the Turkish and Iranian roles at present are multi-dimensional, which makes the subject of their future role a matter of internal calculations and dependent on regional and international variables, which will play a clear role in determining the approach that the Turkish and Iranian role will use in the post-war phase.

The Security Landscape in the Middle East Post-October 7th, 2023

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The attack on October 7th, 2023, surprised and shocked many when Palestinian militants from the Al-Qassam Brigades, a group linked to Hamas, stormed Israeli barriers. However, the impact of this attack went beyond shaking Israeli security; it was also reshaping security in the region. The attack has had a significant effect on the security landscape, making armed groups close to Iran more popular. These groups are either funded, influenced by, or allied with Iran, and they have been expanding their recruitment pool, particularly in areas outside their traditional influence such as the West Bank or Jordan. This, in turn, has provoked a reaction from historically hostile Sunni jihadist groups. The attack

on October 7th has reshaped security and emphasized the overlap between states and non-state actors. The policies of the former often cause reactions and behaviour from the latter, including jihadist groups which have lost their ability to recruit in the region in recent years. This analyse will explore the changes in the security landscape in the region after this attack, assess its expected effects, and examine the new dynamics it has brought forth.

US Policy and Middle East Security

Prior to October 7th, President Joe Biden, like his predecessors, formulated his own doctrine, known as the “Biden Doctrine.” This doctrine outlined his five main principles for the Middle East: Partnership,

Deterrence, Diplomacy, Integration, and Values.⁽¹⁾ These principles served as general guidelines for the US response to the October 7th attack, solidifying their support for Israel. The US position can be understood on two levels. First, Washington expressed eagerness to sign a Saudi-Israeli agreement, focusing on diplomacy and partnership, which should include the future Palestinian State on the agenda. However, the October 7th attack altered priorities, once again placing Palestinian demands at the forefront of the region. This was affirmed by the Hamas leader, who stated that the attack was about reviving the interest in Palestinian concerns.⁽²⁾ Second, the US declared that it “stands by Israel and its security unconditionally” and supported Israel’s Gaza operation to eliminate Hamas. The US believed this would pave the way for a two-state solution and facilitate talks between the Palestinians and Israelis.⁽³⁾

(1) Daniel E. Mouton, The post-October 7 US strategy in the Middle East is coming into focus, November 21, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-post-october-7-us-strategy-in-the-middle-east-is-coming-into-focus/>

(2) See <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/10/18/-أسامة-حمدان-للجزيرة-نت-المقاومة-فوجئت>
 أخبار - عربية ودولية/صحافة/- أخبار
 And <https://www.arab48.com/-أعدنا-القضية-ال فلسطينية-للطاولة-ونأمل-دولية/2023/11/08/قياديون-في-حماس-أعدنا-القضية-ال فلسطينية-للطاولة-ونأمل-بحر-ب-دائمة>

(3) The Economist, How America should manage the next stage

The Biden administration also linked the Gaza war to other significant security issues, including the Russian war in Ukraine, competition with China, building ties with Saudi Arabia, and troubled relations with Iran. The complexity of the Gaza war has further complicated negotiations with Iran. The high human cost in Gaza resulted in condemnation, with Netanyahu’s stubbornness drawing international criticism. This criticism included the US and the Democrat Party⁽⁴⁾ and even led to calls for the ICJ to address the Palestinian tragedy. As a result, American policy has adopted “The Biden Doctrine,” which dictates that Americans, by focusing on soft power, will only react if they are directly targeted. This approach aims to prevent the conflict from expanding regionally or internationally.

In addition, Washington seeks to limit Iranian activities, Tehran increased its reliance on its allies and proxies, such as Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and the Red Sea, and the Iraqi Shia factions. These

of the Gaza war, Nov 29th 2023.

(4) Inside the Democratic rebellion against Biden over the Gaza war, Reuters, February 27, 2024.

groups have been launching attacks in different forms and locations, but their importance has increased for Iran, to exert pressure on the United States.

Iran's Proxies

During a conversation in Gaza in 2017, one of Hamas's influential leaders disclosed to the author, "If we [in Hamas] had the choice of having a single state next to us, we would choose Iran." The ties between Hamas and Iran (particularly regarding support for the revolution in Syria) have caused internal disagreements inside the movement. This disagreement prompted the hawks within Hamas, led by Yahya Al-Sinwar, the head of the movement in the

Gaza Strip, to deepen their relationship with Iran, particularly through the military wing of the movement, al-Qassam Brigades. They have benefited from Iran's assistance in missile production and tactics. However, since October 7th, Iran, in fear of expanding the conflict, has not planned to elevate its ties with Hamas, not even to the level of its ties with Hezbollah. This aligns with Hamas's desire to preserve its Palestinian identity.

Iran perceives October 7th in the same way it justified its intervention in Syria to support Bashar al-Assad's regime a decade ago. According to Iran's former Foreign Minister, Abdul Amir Abdullahian, "We defend our cities by defending Gaza,"⁽⁵⁾ echoing Ayatollah Khamenei's statement, "If we don't stop our enemies [in Syria], they will fight us in Kermanshah and Hamadan." This perspective is referred to as the "Forward Defence" policy, wherein Iran engages in war beyond its borders due to internal pressure⁽⁶⁾. Once again,



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(5) <https://www.irna.ir/news/85260801/> - غزه - امیر عبداللہیان - زمانہ در - غزہ - رو - بیہ پایان - است - نتانیاهو - باید - متوقف

(6) Hamidreza Azizi, The Concept of "Forward Defence": How Has the Syrian Crisis Shaped the Evolution of Iran's Military Strategy?, <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/concept-forward-defence-how-has-syrian-crisis-shaped-evolu->

relying on armed factions is deemed the most effective option for Iran to exert influence. After October 7th, 2023, Iran's "Forward Defence" policy has become more realistic. This has increased the importance of local and national Islamic fighting movements in Iran. The recent Gaza war saw Al-Qassam's tactics being considered effective, leading to an increase in admiration for the movement. Hezbollah, on the other hand, continues to engage in clashes against Israel, albeit with some dispute on the effectiveness. Furthermore, the Houthis are disrupting international trade in the Red Sea, specifically targeting the world maritime trade for the "Gazan people." Iraqi factions have been carrying out attacks, even resulting in the deaths of American soldiers in Jordan. Iran leverages the popularity of these groups to exert pressure on the United States,⁽⁷⁾ which in turn elicits negative reactions from declining jihadi groups in Arab countries.

tion-irans-military-strategy , 3 February 2021.

(7) Polls in the region show such increasing in the popularity of such groups. One of the conducted in Palestinian Territories shows that high percentages of Palestinians are "satisfied" with these regional actors Yemen (i.e Houthis) 80%, Qatar 68%, Hizbullah 49%, Iran 35%...etc. <https://pcpsr.org/ar/node/962>.

The Security Situation in the West Bank

The West Bank is currently living in a semi-war atmosphere, with daily acts of violence such as imprisonments, arrests, house demolitions, crossing difficulties, and restrictions by the Israeli occupation. These acts have resulted in unequal violence by Palestinians, further complicating the Palestinian National Authority's ability to govern the territories and cooperate on security with Israel.



The changes among Palestinian youth in the West Bank and the rising popularity of Hamas, specifically the Qassam Brigades, in the region, give a framework to understand the change in security of the West Bank.

The violence in the West Bank has been sporadic but ongoing since October 7th. The changes among Palestinian youth in the West Bank and the rising popularity

of Hamas, specifically the Qassam Brigades, in the region, give a framework to understand the change in security of the West Bank.

The situation for young people in the West Bank has undergone significant changes since the violent division between Fatah and Hamas in 2006-2007. As a result, young people have lacked a political framework, especially in the West Bank where Fatah plays a role not only as a political movement but also as a socio-economic framework intertwined with Palestinian society. This is similar to the role of Al-Qassam in the Gaza Strip today. Searching for a political umbrella has made ending the division between Fatah and Hamas a key demand of the youth movement in the West Bank.

The term “Hirak” (meaning a socio-political movement) entered Palestinian discourse after the Arab Spring, with villages like Nabi Saleh, Ni’lin, and Bil’in becoming centres of peaceful protests and cultural activities, similar to those seen in the Arab streets during the Arab Spring. However, attempting to replicate

the Arab Spring model in the Palestinian context did not yield tangible results due to the variety of pressing issues across the occupied West Bank.⁽⁸⁾

Since 2015, there has been a new shift among Palestinian youth, who have carried out individual attacks using tactics such as stabbing soldiers or car-ramming. This has increased tension in the West Bank, leading some to refer to this period as the “Third Intifada.”

During this time, I encountered many young men who had relatives or friends involved in such attacks. They denied any political affiliations with Hamas or Fatah and were generally critical of political factions.⁽⁹⁾ Subsequently, young Palestinians in the West Bank began forming their own armed groups, such as the “Jenin Brigade” and the “Lions’ Den” in Nablus. Although the former is associated with the Islamic Jihad movement, it attracted young people from various backgrounds. The Lions’ Den,

(8) See, Ahmad Jamil Azem, *al-Shabab al-Filastini min al-harka ila al-Hirak 1908-2018* (Palestinian Youth from Movement to Protest, 1908-2018), Institute of Palestine Studies, 2019.

(9) The author was the BBC correspondent in the West Bank during that period for a few months.

on the other hand, was an autonomous group, highlighting the absence of organized political umbrellas for young Palestinians. The crackdown on these armed groups by Israeli security and the army has weakened them, which in turn makes Hamas a magnet for young Palestinians in the West Bank due to its increasing popularity.

Hamas's political leaders, except for Yahya Sinwar, have limited popularity in the West Bank. However, during protests in the West Bank for Gaza since October 7th, demonstrators have been chanting the names of Al-Qassam leaders like Muhammad Al-Deif and Abu Ubaida. Al-Deif is the military leader of the Al-Qassam Brigades, while Abu Ubaida serves as the masked spokesperson for the group. One of the most famous chants in the West Bank are: "They say Hamas is a terrorist... the entire West Bank is Hamas." This expression reflects the growing popularity of Al-Qassam, as a military group that could attract frustrated young Palestinians in the West Bank who are seeking a political identity. It is expected that Al-Qassam's recruitment

and activities in the West Bank will increase, resulting in security changes in the region.

The Return of Jihadists?

The attack on October 7th, 2023, raised concerns about the resurgence of radical and jihadist groups. However, this was not a direct result of the Gaza war. The regrouping of jihadists is a process that takes time and was already in progress before the October 7th attacks. Several factors contribute to the emergence and decline of jihadist groups, with the most important being financing, recruitment, and incubators, both social and geographical (such as training camps,



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networks, etc.). These factors can be categorized as hardware and software, using computer terminology. The hardware factors are linked to military actions on the ground, such as attacks and recruitment networks, while the software factors are linked to propaganda and narrative.

After the Gaza war, these factors became intertwined. Pro-Iranian national-Islamic armed groups gained popularity in the Muslim world, which caused dissatisfaction among Sunni jihadist groups. The jihadists found themselves losing ground to their sectarian rivals. In order to regain their position in the competition, the jihadists, who had previously rejected the idea of a patriotic struggle in Palestine and insisted on a religious conflict with Jews, attacked the shrine of Qassem Soleimani in January 2024, followed by an attack in Moscow in March 2024.

This may lead to a resurgence of sectarian discourse and could be fuelled by the tragedies of the Gaza war. These events could provide a jihadist narrative that

appeals to frustrated young people, who may be recruited. In recent years, jihadists have been on the back foot after their defeat in Iraq and Syria in 2017, leading them to retreat to Africa and Afghanistan. Utilizing the Gaza tragedy as a narrative could help the jihadists revive their presence in the Arab world. Additionally, widely believed statements from Gaza serve as perfect anecdotes to reshape the appeal of jihadist recruitment. These statements include “the West’s hypocrisy,” “the West’s endless support for Israel,” “betrayal of Arab regimes,” “the nation’s departure from its religion as the cause of all evils and defeat,” “who will protect the children and women of Gaza?,” and “the liberation of Palestine and Al-Aqsa.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Until jihadists can resume recruiting, some frustrated young Muslims may carry out “lone wolf” attacks in the name of Gaza, which the jihadists will take credit for. This will serve their attempt to compete with pro-Iranian national-Islamic groups.

(10) Widespread among jihadists groups and channels on social media.

Conclusion

The Gaza war, after October 7, 2024, has reshaped the security landscape in the Middle East, presenting numerous security challenges. Israel is reassessing its defence and deterrence capabilities, while the US is working to solidify its policy in the region. Additionally, national-Islamic armed groups supported by Iran are gaining power, causing tension with jihadist groups. In order to reposition themselves in the region, jihadist groups aim to capitalize on the brutal Israeli attacks in Gaza, which resulted in the deaths, displacement, and starvation of tens of thousands of Palestinians.

There are currently two levels of analysis of the security landscape in the Middle East. The first is the geopolitical level, which includes the American-Iranian conflict and the regional balances among various players such as Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. The second level involves non-state players, such as armed national movements and factions. These two levels overlap, as explained after the Gaza war.

This overlapping will lead to further violence in the region due to conflicting interests and ideologies among the parties involved. While states try to avoid broader, open conflicts, non-state actors are responsible for the violence, adopting irregular yet effective and bloody tactics.

Strategic Shifts in the Red Sea

Houthis' Strategies, Gaza War, and Prosperity Guardian Operation

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Since the war on Gaza started on October 7th and the resurgence of the Israeli war on Gaza, the Middle East has faced political and strategic uncertainty, focusing on Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, known as the “axis of resistance.” These events challenge Iran’s allies to implement the “unity of fronts” strategy, which is a strategy meant to deter the U.S. and Israel. While widespread escalation was expected, the most prominent front was led by the Ansar Allah, well known as the (Houthis) in Yemen, which significantly intensified their actions, disrupting Israeli-bound merchant vessels via the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, a crucial maritime chokepoint.

The U.S. launched “Operation Prosperity Guardian” to secure maritime routes in response. The Houthis frame their actions as retaliation for Gaza, whereas the U.S. views them as threats to international trade security. This analysis aims to understand the Houthis’ motivations, assess the U.S. response, and explore the regional implications of the ongoing Red Sea escalation.

Gradual Escalation and The Balance of Threats

After confrontations erupted in Gaza on October 7th, Abdul Malik Al-Houthi declared on October 11th that the Houthis were coordinating with their allies in the axis of resistance, followed by the confrontations around Gaza. Four days later, Hezbollah opened a new front in southern

Lebanon, unexpectedly under minimal rules of engagement, which meant that the Houthis had become involved in the broader regional conflict.

On October 31, pro-Houthi forces in Yemen officially declared their involvement, further escalating the conflict. Initial rocket and drone attacks on Eilat were largely ineffective due to the massive distance. The Houthis primarily used long-range drones and ballistic missiles, posing a low threat level to southern Israel.

Thus, Houthis' strategy shifted to disrupting international shipping routes to Israeli ports, particularly along the coast of Aden and the Red Sea. On November 17, the Houthis escalated by targeting commercial vessels linked to Israel, citing it as a response to Israel's blockade of humanitarian aid to Gaza. The targeting expanded from vessels bound for Israel to those under Israeli ownership, threatening ships travelling towards the Cape of Good Hope route across the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. The Houthis claimed responsibility for targeting 120 vessels(1), significantly impacting Israel's economy amid

the ongoing war in Gaza, marking a departure from Israel's traditional military strategies and extending the conflict for over 230 days.

Therefore, The Houthis' strategy showcases a new dimension in the regional "axis of resistance" strategy. Although a proper balance of power between Iran and its allies on one side and Israel and the United States on the other remains elusive, an alternative approach emerges through the concept of a "Balance of Threats," where this strategy, as employed by the Houthis in the Red Sea escalation, focuses on leveraging asymmetrical warfare tactics to disrupt Israel's economic lifelines and maritime security without seeking direct military confrontation. By targeting commercial vessels



Although a proper balance of power between Iran and its allies on one side and Israel and the United States on the other remains elusive, an alternative approach emerges through the concept of a "Balance of Threats"

(1) Arab NEWS, "EU Red Sea mission says it defended 120 ships from Houthi attacks", 19-May-2024, link: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2513266/middle-east>

and using drones and missiles, the Houthis create significant financial and political costs for Israel, thereby exerting indirect pressure. This strategy exploits vulnerabilities in Israel's economic and security frameworks, enhancing deterrence through credible threats supported by Iranian capabilities. The goal is to offset Israel's superior military power, compel strategic reconsideration, and gain leverage in regional politics and negotiations.

Moreover, the disruption of Israel's maritime trade and shipping routes in the Red Sea by the Houthis not only presents a direct threat in the context of the Gaza war but also exposes the economic vulnerabilities of Israel, creating a sort of equilibrium through balancing threats.



By engaging in a foreign conflict, the Houthis attempt to divert public and international attention from the significant issues they face within their controlled areas, such as economic hardship, governance deficiencies, and public services problems

This dynamic is further reinforced by Iranian support, enhancing the Houthis' ballistic and drone capabilities. This is particularly evident in the four waves of escalation declared by Abdul Malik al-Houthi on May 9, 2024, illustrating the extent of Houthi capabilities and the realisation of "threat credibility".

Politically, the Houthis' strategy may somehow reflect the "Madman tactic," where theoretically, perceived madness should enhance the credibility of a leader's threats(2). Thus, the Houthis' gradual escalation is designed to assert their position and link the Gaza and Red Sea fronts. This shift aims to create a new political dynamic that could favour the Houthis in future negotiations, allowing them to maximise their gains. It may create a new claim within the context of the Yemeni dispute.

Analysing Houthi's Motivations and Goals

The Houthis' relentless escalation in the conflict distinguishes them within the "axis of resistance," prompting essential inquiries into their underlying motives and strategic objectives. Although their public narrative is framed around their anti-Israel ideology, practical considerations point

(2) Schwartz, Joshua A. 2023. "Madman or Mad Genius? The International Benefits and Domestic Costs of the Madman Strategy." *Security Studies* 32 (2): 271–305. doi:10.1080/09636412.2023.2197619/.

to a combination of local and regional political ambitions influencing their involvement. Here are the primary motivations behind the Houthis' heightened activity, which could be summarised as follows:

1. Enhancing Domestic Standing and Regional Influence: The Houthis' actions in the Red Sea, linked to the events in Gaza, are primarily aimed at solidifying their domestic support by aligning with the widely endorsed Palestinian cause, which helps the Houthis strengthen their position within Yemen and beyond.

2. Shifting Public Opinion from Internal Challenges: By engaging in a foreign conflict, the Houthis attempt to divert public and international attention from the significant issues they face within their controlled areas, such as economic hardship, governance deficiencies, and public services problems. Potentially weakening their hold, the Houthis are using Western military operations against them to boost their popularity among pro-Palestinian Arab audiences. Additionally, they aim to position themselves as the legitimate rulers of Yemen(3).

3. Enhancing the Houthis' Position within the Resistance Axis: Targeting Israeli vessels has elevated the Houthis' standing within the resistance axis, gaining them greater recognition and support from allied groups and proxies. This engagement also helps transcend sectarian differences, emphasising the authenticity of their resistance despite differing religious doctrines with other groups on the axis.

4. Asserting Anti-Israel and Anti-Western Sentiments: The Houthis aim to position themselves as critical opponents of Israel and Western interests, particularly the United States. This stance is well-received in Yemen and other Arab nations, especially as the West's unyielding support for Israel becomes more contentious amid Gaza's deteriorating conditions.

5. Compensating for Allies' Inaction: With other groups in the resistance axis engaging minimally since October 7, the Houthis have stepped up to preserve the axis' unity and integrity. Their proactive involvement addresses the dissatisfaction and doubts about the commitment of other fronts that claim to support Gaza

(3) Nasser, Afrah, "Instead of Houthi Designation, the United States Should Embrace a Comprehensive Approach", Arab Centre Washington DC, 28-Feb-2024, link: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/instead-of-houthi-designation-the-united-states-should-embrace-a-comprehensive-approach/>

U.S. Response and Prosperity Guardian Operation

In response to Houthi attacks on Israeli vessels, the United States and several Western countries launched Operation Prosperity Guardian on December 18, 2023, forming an international naval coalition led by the Bahrain-based Joint Task Force (CTF-150). This coalition includes 14 states, primarily led by the United States and the United Kingdom. Additionally, on January 17, the U.S. reclassified the Houthis as a terrorist organisation.

However, major Arab Red Sea powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt have abstained from joining the coalition. Saudi Arabia's strategic disengagement aims to avoid regional escalations, focusing instead on domestic development and modernisation, including settling conflicts within Yemen. Egypt's reluctance is driven by its political, diplomatic, and security commitments concerning Gaza amidst internal unrest.

The absence of these critical regional players underscores the coalition's limited effectiveness. Despite this, on January 4, 2024, the UN Security Council, informed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Secretary-General, noted that Houthi attacks had disrupted 15% of global

shipping through the Red Sea. Subsequently, resolution 2722 was adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on January 10, condemning these attacks and calling for their cessation. Following this, the US and UK launched airstrikes on Yemeni regions, which the Houthis criticised as unjustified aggression supporting Israel.

However, Joe Biden's administration has formed a naval coalition Prosperity Guardian with Western allies to protect shipping and conducted airstrikes against the Houthis but lacks a comprehensive strategy to address the crisis(4). Following 73 airstrikes(5), US and UK warships have been targeted by ballistic missiles and suicide drones, requiring defensive actions. Thus, the current landscape creates uncertainty about achieving the ultimate goals of this coalition.

Implications of Escalation in the Red Sea on the Middle East

The Houthi strategy, linking their escalation to the Gaza conflict and prompting the formation of the U.S.-led "Prosperity Guardian" coalition, has

(4) Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "The US' Red Sea strategy has failed to deter the Houthis", *The New Arab*, 3-Apr-2024, link: <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/us-red-sea-strategy-has-failed-deter-houthis>

(5) Reuters, "US and Britain strike Yemen in reprisal for Houthi attacks on shipping", 13-Jan-2024, link: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-britain-carry-out-strikes-against-houthis-yemen-officials-202411-01/>

several critical implications for regional security:

1. Inseparability of the Red Sea and Gaza

Conflicts: The Houthi escalation complicates efforts to separate the Red Sea crisis from the Gaza war, making negotiations difficult, especially concerning Houthi demands related to Gaza.

2. Adoption of a New Houthi Strategy: The threat to shipping lines marks a novel approach for the Houthis, aiming to balance threats rather than military power, shifting the broader conflict dynamics between the axis of resistance and Israel and its allies. In the political sphere, the Houthis' strategy reflects the "Madman tactic," where perceived irrationality enhances the credibility of their threats. Their gradual escalation aims to assert their position and link the Gaza and Red Sea fronts, creating a new political dynamic that could favour them in future negotiations. This approach may also bolster their position within the Yemeni dispute, allowing them to maximise their gains.

3. Enhanced Local Legitimacy: The Houthis' military actions and targeting of Israeli interests bolster their status as the de facto authority

in Yemen, increasing their acceptance amid growing anti-Zionist and anti-West sentiments.

4. Increased Conflict Costs: The escalation raises political and economic costs for Israel and the U.S., particularly if the conflict continues without a resolution or ceasefire in Gaza.

5. Shifting from "Unity of Fronts" to "Supporting Fronts": The strategy has shifted from collective intervention to supporting Hamas and Palestinian factions without direct involvement, increasing the cost to Israel.

6. Growing Iranian Influence: The Houthis' role in the Red Sea enhances Iran's regional influence, suggesting potential coordination and pressure from Iran. This influence is evident through Iran's political sway and technological support, highlighting Iran's growing leverage in Middle Eastern geopolitics.

The Future of Escalation in the Red Sea

The future of the escalation in the Red Sea is uncertain and highly complex. However, several potential paths can be envisaged:

1. Unilateral Suspension Scenario: Given the challenges in resolving the confrontation with the Houthis and achieving the objectives of

Operation Prosperity Guardian, the suspension of operations is a plausible path. This could happen if negotiations successfully secure a ceasefire in Gaza. Such an outcome would likely halt Houthi attacks on Israeli vessels, providing political gains to the Houthis, enhancing their legitimacy, and bolstering their regional role. This scenario would reflect the coalition's inability to neutralise the Houthis, potentially leading to a symbolic victory for them and reinforcing their influence in the region. Thus, the continued tensions in the Red Sea would complicate navigation security efforts and might necessitate stopping Operation Prosperity Guardian strikes. It would also elevate the Houthis' legitimacy, possibly extending their influence beyond Yemen.

Key Characteristics:

A) Negotiated Ceasefire: Diplomatic efforts successfully secured a ceasefire in Gaza, leading to a halt in Houthi attacks on Israeli vessels, which is consistent with the Houthis' claim over the current escalation.

B) Political Gains for Houthis: The cessation of hostilities boosts the Houthis' political legitimacy and strengthens their position within Yemen and the broader region.

C) Coalition Reevaluation: The U.S.-led coalition reconsiders its strategy and may scale back military operations, which could lead to a cease-operation from the coalition.

2- Stalemate and Low-Intensity Conflict Scenario

Another potential path for future escalation in the Red Sea involves a prolonged stalemate characterised by low-intensity conflict. In this scenario, neither the Houthis nor the U.S.-led coalition achieves a decisive victory, resulting in ongoing skirmishes and a persistent threat to maritime security.

Key Characteristics:

A) Ongoing Houthi Attacks: Persistent, low-level asymmetric attacks by the Houthis on commercial vessels and military assets, maintaining pressure on Israel and the U.S.-led coalition without escalating to full-scale war.

B) Defensive Coalition Operations: The U.S.-led coalition focuses on defensive measures, such as convoy escorts and enhanced maritime surveillance, to protect shipping routes.

C) Diplomatic Stalemate: Continued diplomatic efforts yield limited progress, with both sides entrenched in their positions and no significant

breakthroughs, especially in terms of conflicting narratives over the escalation by U.S. separation of fronts and Houthis asserting to link them.

D) Economic Disruption: Prolonged disruption of maritime trade routes to Israel leads to increased shipping costs and economic uncertainty, which prospect to weaken Israel's economy.

E) Regional Power Play: Iran continues to bolster the Houthis, using the conflict to expand its regional influence and counter U.S. and Israeli interests.

3. Direct Military Intervention Scenario:

The consensus in the UN Security Council on the need to de-escalate the Red Sea conflict could provide a pretext for the United States and its allies to intervene directly under the guise of restoring regional stability and protecting international navigation. This could be justified by Security Council Resolution 2722 of January 10, 2024, which condemns Houthi attacks on merchant vessels. Despite potential justifications, significant obstacles reduce the likelihood of military intervention, such as the Houthis' effective military control and strategic deployments in northern Yemen, making land intervention complex and costly. Moreover, international and regional opposition,

especially from countries like Iran, Russia, and China, could further complicate direct military action. A direct intervention could provoke escalations on other fronts, particularly involving Hezbollah in Lebanon, making this option risky and necessitating careful consideration of its potential costs and benefits.

Key Characteristics:

A) UN-Backed Justification: The U.S. and its allies gain international support, possibly through a UN Security Council resolution, for direct military intervention to counter Houthi threats.

B) Comprehensive Military Campaign: A large-scale military campaign involving ground, naval, and air operations may be launched to dismantle Houthi military capabilities and secure key areas in Yemen.

C) High Operational Risks: Significant military and political risks, including potential escalation with Iran and its proxies and high civilian casualties, leading to a high-level deadlock in Yemen.

D) Regional Opposition: Strong opposition from key regional players such as Iran, Russia,

and China would complicate the intervention and lead to broader geopolitical tensions.

E) Humanitarian Fallout: The humanitarian crisis in Yemen will be worsening due to intensified conflict, increased displacement, and disruption of aid efforts.



The absence of crucial regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt from the coalition reflects their strategic priorities and questions the operation's effectiveness.

Conclusion

The geopolitical complexities of the Red Sea have intensified due to the Gaza conflict and the Houthis' strategic actions in Yemen. The Houthis' targeted attacks on Israeli-linked maritime routes have introduced a disruptive new dimension, linking Red Sea stability to broader Middle Eastern escalation. Their latest strategy of balancing threats (as a non-state

actor) —leveraging asymmetrical tactics to create economic and security challenges—has exposed Israel's vulnerabilities and exerted indirect pressure on both Israel and its allies. This approach highlights the evolving nature of modern conflict, where non-state actors can significantly impact regional stability.

The U.S.-led Operation Prosperity Guardian underscores the challenges and limitations of international military coalitions in addressing such multifaceted threats. The absence of crucial regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt from the coalition reflects their strategic priorities and questions the operation's effectiveness. These dynamics illustrate a broader trend of regional powers focusing inward and avoiding entanglement in additional conflicts.

The intertwined nature of the Red Sea tensions and the Gaza conflict complicates efforts to address these crises independently. The Houthi strategy of targeting maritime routes has significantly raised political and economic costs for Israel and the United States, emphasising the need for a comprehensive approach that balances military readiness with robust diplomatic initiatives. Future scenarios range from negotiated suspensions of Houthi operations to potential, though complex and

risky, direct military interventions. Each option carries significant implications for regional stability and international relations.

In conclusion, the escalating tensions in the Red Sea highlight the interconnected and multifaceted nature of Middle Eastern geopolitics. Ensuring regional stability requires a delicate balance of military and diplomatic efforts, focusing on addressing the underlying drivers of conflict. The Houthis' rise and their strategic use of asymmetrical tactics challenge Western efforts to protect international shipping and expose flaws

in the U.S. strategy of relying solely on deterrence and force without addressing Yemen's stability. A sustainable resolution to the Palestinian issue remains pivotal, necessitating coordinated international engagement and support for a practical two-state solution. Without comprehensive efforts to stabilise Yemen and the region, the Houthi threat will persist. A ceasefire in Gaza might temporarily halt their attacks. Still, they could resume pressure on Israel, Saudi Arabia, or the U.S., leaving the Red Sea's stability uncertain with far-reaching consequences.

BOOK REVIEWS

Conspiracy theory from a psychological perspective

ABRAR AL-OBWINI

Research assistant at the PSI.

Book name: The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories

Author: Jan-Willem van Prooijen

Translated by: Mounir Alimi

Publisher: Routledge (In English), Page Seven (In Arabic)

Year of publication: 2018, translated in 2022



Over the past decades, especially with the spread of the positivist scientific approach, conspiracy theories have been labeled as akin to a mental illness, associated with paranoia. Conspiracy theories were seen as a model of a troubled, superstitious mentality, incapable of constructing logical, scientific, and rational sequences between events. Consequently, Karl Popper, for example, did not hesitate to classify the conspiratorial mentality as unscientific. Harold Lasswell, the renowned political science professor,

followed his lead, along with other sociologists and cultural scholars who viewed conspiracy theories as a real mental problem, harmful to scientific research and public discourse. These ideas were largely prevalent in contemporary scientific circles until many scientific and cultural trends began to review and deconstruct that perspective, attempting to move away from preconceived and packaged judgments about conspiracy theories and those who believe in them.

Many recent studies have advanced research in the field of "conspiracy theory," subjecting the theory itself to study and analysis. These studies distinguished between various models of conspiracy theories (global conspiracy, partial conspiracy, etc.), and categorized believers in conspiracy theories into those with a conspiratorial mindset and those who see the possibility of conspiracies in certain contexts without wholly dismissing them. The fields, theories, and research areas addressing conspiracy theories have become diverse and numerous. In historical and analytical philosophical schools, a perspective emerged suggesting that excluding conspiracy theories from rational and scientific thinking is unscientific in itself. This is because political history is replete with both covert and overt plots and conspiracies, which may not be examinable by current positivist scientific tools—not because they don't exist, but because those tools are incapable of penetrating the surface of events and exploring their depths. Contemporary history is filled with events later revealed to be connected to secret and mysterious plots, such as the Watergate scandal, among others, which shook the American political scene.

In fact, anyone who follows contemporary American drama and films today will notice the significant presence and influence of conspiracy

theories, as seen in popular series like "House of Cards" and "Homeland." Similarly, philosophical schools and approaches, such as analytical and applied philosophy, have moved away from dismissing the concept of conspiracy and reducing conspiracy theory to psychological interpretation, as social science researchers did. Instead, there is a broad scope for understanding and explaining the emergence of conspiracy theories through reality itself, which is filled with mysteries and conspiracies. Therefore, some scholars propose a different approach, which involves considering the conditional factor when thinking about events, especially those that may have a hint of conspiracy.

Subsequently, many researchers began to employ the ideas of the French sociologist and philosopher Michel Foucault in understanding conspiracy theories, especially regarding the relationship between power and knowledge. Therefore, conspiracy theories can be viewed as the narratives that have been concealed and tamed by the authorities and institutions dominating the media and political circles, as they are the most capable of disseminating their narrative. Perhaps the conspiracy narrative is the one that reveals the truth, but it does not possess the power that the conspirators possess!

Within this scientific-methodological debate, my interest in the book "The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories" by Jan-Willem van Prooijen comes for two main reasons:

The first reason is that the book sheds in-depth light on one of the approaches to dealing with conspiracy theories, which is based on trying to deconstruct the psychological, cultural, and social conditions and foundations that underlie some people's belief in conspiracy theories and others' denial of them.

The second reason is that the author of the book, Jan-Willem van Prooijen, is an academic and researcher highly specialized in the field of psychology, law, and crime, and is greatly interested in conspiracy theories and what he describes as the "dark side" of humans. Additionally, he also defines himself as an adherent of the behavioral school, which (as we mentioned earlier) takes a critical stance towards conspiracy theories and generally considers them a pathological or negative condition. Therefore, I saw it as necessary for us to explore this perspective through one of its most prominent supporters, which does not necessarily mean that I endorse or agree with what van Prooijen had concluded.

The book in our hands, "The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories" (translated into Arabic in

2022, with the English version published in 2018), examines conspiracy theories from a psychological perspective. It studies these theories by posing a set of contentious questions through which the author attempts to analyze the psychological reasons behind why some people embrace conspiracy theories while others do not. Based on this analysis, the book presents various models and events, demonstrating the underlying contentious differences in how people interpret them. People's belief in these theories may involve psychological factors stemming from the individuals themselves, leading to reactions to certain or unexpected situations that the mind rejects.

The book provides a theoretical analysis of the extent to which conspiracy theories influence individuals' lives and choices, and how they led to the emergence of different ideologies and populist currents that demonstrated their influence in the political sphere. Therefore, van Prooijen sees the importance of seriously studying conspiracy theories, even if we reject them, as they have become a societal phenomenon that dominates minds. The significance of this book is not to explain the validity of these theories or not, but to know, study, and analyze the personal characteristics of those who believe in them and those who do not. This book was built through

serious discussions between van Prooijen and a select group of researchers in the psychology of conspiracy theories. Van Prooijen divided his book into six chapters, and we will address the highlights of his analysis and study of the psychology of conspiracy theories.

First: The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories

Van Prooijen begins this chapter by mentioning the famous event of the September 11th attacks, and the multiple interpretations accompanying it, many of which were linked to conspiracy theories. From here, the author proceeds to analyze, albeit in a simple way, through multiple models the rush of some people towards conspiracy theories related to these events. The intriguing aspect is his examination of numerous examples throughout history, which prompts the reader to research and reflect on the dialectic of the theories proposed around them. There are also examples for cinephiles of some films and series that revolve around conspiracy theories, especially in the political sphere.

Van Prooijen reviewed many tangible real-life examples of certain conspiracy theories and tried to explain them through his presentation of the concept of conspiracy theories from his perspective, as well as his discussion of five crucial

elements that must be collectively present for us to claim that an issue is a conspiracy:

1- Patterns, meaning the existence of a series of links between events and people, which generate a conspiracy theory that did not arise by mere coincidence.

2- The Agent, meaning the presence of active parties that deliberately caused an event through a complex and detailed plan.

3- Alliances, there is also a group of active parties here, but they do not necessarily have to be human. Here, the author gives an example of non-human conspiracy theories, such as the movie *The Matrix* and the reptilian conspiracy.

4- Hostility, manifested by the presence of selfish goals that do not fall within the public interest, despite the existence of benevolent conspiracies (as we try as adults to convince children of the existence of Santa Claus), but this is not the focus of the book. The term "conspiracy theories" here is limited to conspiracies suspected of being hostile.

5- Ongoing Secrecy, meaning that the conspiracies have not been revealed with proven evidence, but rather are alliances operating in secret. Here, the author notes that a conspiracy that is proven

with evidence, such as the Yalta Conference, is no longer a theory but a well-established example of the formation of a conspiracy.

Through what has been mentioned, the author convincingly explains the reasons that lead him to classify or not classify certain events as conspiracy theories by referring back to the five elements.

"Have you ever considered the possibility that our theories might be correct?" This question, mentioned by the author because people constantly ask him this, really prompts us to think deeply about our interpretation of events and phenomena. However, the author emphasizes—and this is the crux of the discussion—that the book does not seek to determine the validity of those conspiracy theories but rather to study the theory and mindset of the conspiracy itself. In other words, the question is not whether a particular conspiracy is real or not, but why people believe there is a conspiracy. The other issue is when this belief can be considered logical thinking or, conversely, when it reflects another psychological or mental state.

Second: When Do People Believe in Conspiracy Theories?

"How do you explain the fact that conspiracy theories are on the rise nowadays?" With this question, van Prooijen begins the second chapter, and he attempts

to detail his answer, accompanied by evidence from studies and statistics revolving around this topic. However, he reaches the opposite conclusion that conspiracy theories are not actually increasing. His way of explaining events and ideas makes the reader ponder the details behind these words. The overarching idea here is linking the occurrence of societal crises with the emergence of conspiracy theories. The author connects people's sense of threat and fear with their formation of conspiratorial ideas to counter this feeling. The more the state of distrust among people increases, the more likely they are to attribute any negative events to conspiracy theories and link them to groups that differ from them or even groups in power. Van Prooijen analyzes this through psychological explanations related to people's belief that a major event must have a major cause behind it, which the author explains under the term "proportionality bias."

In addition to the psychological explanation above, van Prooijen also mentions what is called the "self-interest myth," through which people link some individuals' behaviors to selfishness and the pursuit of self-interest.

Third: The Structure of Belief

"What drives people to believe in the strangest things despite the lack of evidence?" This is what the author attempts to explain in this chapter. He

clarifies the concept of belief and distinguishes it from the truth, dissects the "cognitive processes" that generate each, and analyzes how the human mind perceives patterns and causality, and their importance in determining the content of events and categorizing them as conspiracy theories or not. In this chapter, he differentiates the aspects of the relationship between conspiracy beliefs and other beliefs by referring to the five elements mentioned in the first chapter.

The author explains the conspiratorial mindset by posing the question, "What is belief?" which is the confidence in the truth or existence of something without tangible proof. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between beliefs and truth. People vary in the extent of their conspiratorial mindset activity. Believing in one conspiracy theory increases the likelihood of believing in other conspiracy theories among those who hold such beliefs. This mindset functions like a cycle. For example, the more people believe that the events of September 11 were an inside job, the more likely they are to believe that pharmaceutical companies conduct illegal medical experiments in third-world countries.

This thinking differs among people based on their traits and backgrounds. The conspiratorial mindset results from psychological factors related to past

experiences or negative events that have influenced a person's subconscious and their interpretation of occurrences, in contrast to other mindsets that may have experienced better circumstances and events. The author emphasizes the importance of not getting lost in the randomness of events, which would lead to randomness in interpretation and analysis later on. If the five components previously mentioned do not apply to the beliefs, they cannot be classified as a conspiracy, unlike the Watergate scandal, which became a factual reality due to the presence and verification of the five components.

Fourth: The Social Roots of Conspiracy Theories

At the beginning of this chapter, the author presents a living and direct example of what we previously mentioned about people resorting to conspiracy theories as a reaction to a certain shock or incident. He reveals to us dialectical factors in viewing different events and the feelings towards them from different citizens, defining this relationship with two sides (us) versus (them), and clarifying the influence of identity and group affiliation in explaining the social roots of conspiracy theories.

This chapter focuses on conducting comparative studies between different samples of the same

event to explain the underlying social reasons behind believing in conspiracy theories, through a sense of threat that may face the group itself internally, or an external threat from a stronger group. These characteristics used by van Prooijen for explanation, illustrate the social roots associated with interpreting conspiracy theories, the real social problems that drive them, and how the mentality of superiority affects the view towards different groups. Van Prooijen sheds light on the way the historical promotion of certain ideas about certain groups has contributed to the spread of conspiratorial ideas that are still circulating today.

Fifth: Conspiracy Theories and Ideology

This chapter focuses on identifying the details of the relationship between conspiracy theories by linking them to three dimensions: repressive regimes, modern democracies, and marginalized extremist groups. The essence here is not a comparison of these systems per se, but rather a comparison between populist and moderate voters within these systems. Then the dialectical question here is, "How do conspiracy narratives contribute to influencing people and raising the populism of certain groups or spectrums in power?" This is linked

to another question: What is the psychological factor and the actual need behind people's tendency to believe these conspiratorial narratives?

This chapter includes comparisons that represent the extent to which belief in conspiracy theories is more prevalent among extremist groups across different ideologies than among moderate groups. It clarifies the underlying relationship behind believing conspiracy theories and the tendency towards extremism, which in turn will turn into violence. The author concludes that when extremist forces come to power, they usually suppress the opposition and restrict freedom of expression among citizens, all because of their fear of conspiracies. Here, the author mentions his visit to Cuba and the extent of his feeling of oppression over people's lives, which makes the people of this country hesitant to talk about politics as extremist governments are always suspicious of their citizens for fear of conspiratorial activities against the state.

I believe that when we look back at historical contexts, we will see the extent to which these discourses have influenced certain individuals' rise to power and their impact on the ideas

circulating among people. As a result of these observations, the author concludes that belief in conspiracy theories is prevalent among individuals who support extremist ideologies. The sources of this prevalence are, firstly, historical evidence showing that conspiracy theories are a fundamental part of oppressive dictatorial regimes; secondly, political psychology research reveals that populist voters are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than those who vote for moderate parties; and thirdly, qualitative analyses of fringe extremist groups indicate that conspiracy theories are common among these groups.

Sixth: Explaining Conspiracy Theories and Reducing Their Influence

We notice that the author does not classify believing in conspiracies as a disease, but rather explains it as a psychological response to surrounding factors that led to feelings of distrust and a sense of threat. Van Prooijen's

goal was not to condemn or endorse conspiracy theories, but rather to attempt to answer a key question: Why do conspiracy theories spread among people? And what can policymakers do to reduce the influence of their spread?

Negative emotions that people experience can be considered one of the main reasons for their belief in and the spread of conspiracy theories. The underlying reasons for conspiracy theories can be classified as cognitive processes that shape our perception of events around us, defensive reactions to protect the group an individual belongs to, or beliefs that make an individual reject what is different from them. Van Prooijen explains that the methods to reduce the spread of these theories should not involve suppression or promoting naivety among the public. Instead, it should involve spreading a clear picture that helps people distinguish between what is reasonable and believable and what is not.

PSI'S ACTIVITIES

DURING THE FIRST HALF OF 2024



Workshop:

"The West Bank and Jerusalem in the aftermath of the War on Gaza: A Reading in Palestinian Reality and Future Prospects"

On January 29, PSI held a closed workshop "The West Bank and Jerusalem in the aftermath of the War on Gaza: A Reading in Palestinian Reality and Future Prospects", in which many Jordanian researchers and politicians met with Palestinian activists, researchers, and academics. The workshop dealt with the extent of Israeli operations and restrictions on the population in the West Bank and Jerusalem and discussed the attitudes of Palestinian public opinion (in the West Bank) towards this war. In addition, the workshop discussed the role of the Palestinian Authority today and the social rules enjoyed by the different Palestinian factions, as well as talking about the new Palestinian generation. The workshop also shed light on the reality of Jordanian-Palestinian relations, and the Palestinian view towards Jordan and its role in the Palestinian cause. The workshop was organized as a Track II Diplomacy, through which the Institute conducts a series of intensive dialogues with the Palestinian side.

"The Three Middle-Easts: the Good, the Bad, and the Real"

PSI held on January 30 a dialogue session titled: "The Three Middel-Easts: the Good, the Bad, and the Real," in which the main speaker was Peter Harling, Former senior adviser to the UN and the International Crisis Group, and the current head of Synaps at the Politics and Society Institute.



Workshop:

"An Eye on the West Bank after October 7: A Reading of the Political and Security Scenes"

PSI held a closed workshop entitled "An Eye on the West Bank after October 7: A Reading of the Political and Security Scenes", which came in an attempt to read and understand in depth what is happening in the West Bank at the security and political levels. The workshop focused on the role of the Palestinian Authority and the question of its legitimacy, along with the new armed movements by the Palestinian youth generation, in addition to reading the impact of the political and security scene on the economic and social reality of the Palestinian population. It also discussed the nature of the required Jordanian role as imagined by Palestinians in the West Bank. The workshop was organized as a Track II Diplomacy, through which the Institute conducts a series of intensive dialogues with the Palestinian side.





Panel Discussion: "The Diplomatic Battle After October 7"

PSI, with the presence of political, media, and academic elites, held a panel discussion hosting His Excellency Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador to the United Kingdom, to talk about the Palestinian diplomatic battle after October 7th in light of the unprecedented Western support that was provided to Israel, especially at the beginning of the war on Gaza. The session also discussed the extremely biased media reaction supporting the Israeli side and showing much indifference to the Palestinian side.



Workshop:

"Jerusalem after October 7: Reality, Challenges and Upcoming Scenarios"

On March 5, PSI held a workshop entitled "Jerusalem after October 7th: Reality, Challenges and Upcoming Scenarios", in which several young Jerusalemites, academics, scholars, and political and social activists participated. The session also included researchers, academics, politicians, and Jordanian youth. The workshop had focused on the challenges facing Palestinians as well as the question of identity in light of the severe restrictions that Jerusalemites are exposed to, especially after October 7th. In addition, the workshop focused on discussing the crisis of different sectors facing the threat of "Israelization", specifically the education sector. It also discussed the challenges facing Palestinian youth in light of widespread unemployment and many the other challenges faced by the residents of Jerusalem in terms of absentee property, restrictions when entering Al-Aqsa Mosque, and what Christians are exposed to when entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and performing their rituals. The workshop concluded with the relationship between Jordan and Jerusalemites and the evaluation of official Jordanian efforts in Jerusalem and ways to develop the Kingdom's role there. The workshop was organized as a Track II Diplomacy, through which the Institute conducts a series of intensive dialogues with the Palestinian side.



Panel Discussion: "Water Security in Jordan: Reality and Challenges"

On the 6th of March, the Politics and Society Institute held a discussion session titled "Water Security in Jordan: Reality and Challenges." The session included a number of researchers, experts in the water sector and environmental studies, and former ministers. The attendees highlighted major crises facing the water sector in Jordan, primarily issues of management and governance, alongside challenges related to water legislation, funding crises, and the shared water basins with neighboring countries, especially the Israeli side.



7. "Palestine and the New Generation: Reality, Challenges, and Visions"

On the 7th of March, the Politics and Society Institute held a virtual discussion session via Zoom, involving students of political science and international relations from Bir Zeit, Al-Najah, and Hebron universities. The session, titled "Palestine and the New Generation: Reality, Challenges, and Visions," discussed the implications of the Gaza war on the West Bank's reality, the challenges faced by youth and university students in particular, and the expected scenarios from their perspective amidst the increasing Israeli practices against Palestinians.



Workshop:

"Political Retreat with Public Universities"

On the 8th of March, the Politics and Society Institute, in cooperation with the King Abdullah II Fund for Development, held a "Political Retreat" with the Deans of Student Affairs in public universities, along with the Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Azmi Mahafzah. The retreat was part of the

"Ciasometer" project, which the institute implements in cooperation with the KAFD in Jordanian public universities to evaluate the progress of student political activities and the preparatory phase for student union elections in universities.



Workshop: "Jordanian Youth and the Political Environment after the Gaza War"

On April 30, the Politics and Society Institute held a workshop titled "Jordanian Youth and the Political Environment after the Gaza War," with participation from active youth, politicians, and social figures from various governorates. The workshop discussed the question of the impact of the Gaza war on youth and

their attitudes, the question of political engagement or isolation in anticipation of parliamentary elections, and the emergence of intense identity polarization recently seen in Jordan. The workshop also addressed what official institutions must do today regarding the widespread political engagement amongst the youth and their discourse.



Workshop:

"Jordanian Policies and the Internal Front after the Gaza War"

On May 1, the Politics and Society Institute held a workshop on "Jordanian Policies and the Internal Front after the Gaza War," with participation from political, partisan, and academic elites. The workshop discussed the implications of the Gaza war on political participation and party work with the upcoming parliamentary elections, alongside the prominent issue of national identity that emerged after the war. The workshop also touched on the relationship between the state and citizens, and the official media message.



Workshop: "Jordanian-Palestinian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities in the Coming Phase"

On May 11, the Politics and Society Institute held a closed workshop titled "Jordanian-Palestinian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities in the Coming Phase," with participation from Palestinian and Jordanian experts, researchers, and academics. The workshop was conducted under the Track 2 format, through which the institute conducts a series of intensive dialogues with the Palestinian side. It addressed the challenges facing the relationship between the two countries at both official and public levels, the opportunities available to develop the ties amid Israeli pressures, and the relationship between the two sides from the perspective of Jordanian national security considerations.

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ABOUT PSI

Politics and Society Institute (PSI), is a Jordanian nonprofit, policy and research organization established to advance practical research, innovative ideas and realistic solutions toward building a more prosperous Jordan and a stable region.

The Institute is an independent organization that aims to deepen the understanding of public policy and decision-making processes and to build a better knowledge platform of domestic and regional dynamics that will define our future.

The Institute advances its mission guided by the values of the rule of law, civil society, good governance, and moderation. It provides an innovative, integrated, and global approach to its analysis of complex trends and transformations with particular attention to youth dynamics.

The Institute aims to provide practical solutions, based on up-to-date studies and research in political, economic, security, and social fields. The Institute hopes to define future trends for Jordan and the region through its analysis and projections, focusing on the impact of accelerating transformations on the politics and societies of the Middle East.

By bringing together experts and thinkers from various disciplines and regions, the institute hopes to be able to build ideas and solutions through current and relevant research and integrated analysis that can help policymakers advance national interests and build a more stable region by effectively responding to complex challenges and rapid transformations.

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