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The King Hussein Bridge Crisis
From Managing Symptoms to Building a Sovereign Border Crossing System

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Introduction

The King Hussein Bridge crisis recurs year after year in much the same form: overcrowded waiting halls, delays stretching for hours, and rising travel costs that are ultimately borne by Palestinian travelers. Although the underlying causes of this recurring crisis have been thoroughly documented in numerous studies and official discussions, policy responses have remained confined to temporary operational measures that address the symptoms rather than the structural drivers of the problem.

The significance of this issue extends well beyond its immediate service dimension. The King Hussein Bridge is the only land crossing connecting Jordan with the West Bank, serving as a critical gateway for the movement of people and the exchange of goods between the two sides. It also reflects the efficiency of Jordan's logistical infrastructure and its capacity to adapt to rapidly evolving regional dynamics. Improving the bridge's performance, therefore, is not simply a matter of reducing waiting times; it is an investment in Jordan's competitiveness within the regional transportation network and a means of reinforcing its position as a principal transit hub in the Levant.

This paper is built upon a central premise: no partial or seasonal intervention can resolve the bridge crisis because its roots lie across three interrelated levels, each governed by its own institutional logic and set of responsible actors. Rather than offering yet another diagnosis of a well-known problem, the paper proposes a package of actionable policy recommendations, each accompanied by clearly identified implementing institutions, implementation timelines, and measurable indicators of success. This framework is intended to enable decision-makers to monitor implementation effectively and ensure institutional accountability.

Why Does the King Hussein Bridge Deserve Such Attention?

The starting point is widely accepted: the King Hussein Bridge is not an ordinary international border crossing between two states. Rather, it is the only gateway through which approximately 3.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank can access the outside world without transiting through an Israeli airport. This reality elevates the bridge from a conventional border facility to a strategic asset with four interconnected dimensions.

The first dimension is both humanitarian and political. Every measure that facilitates Palestinian movement across the bridge represents a direct investment in their ability to remain on their land, while every additional obstacle increases the likelihood of either forced or voluntary displacement. Supporting such resilience is not merely a humanitarian imperative; it has long been a cornerstone of Jordan's policy toward the Palestinian issue.

The second dimension concerns Jordan's image in the eyes of Palestinians, which is shaped-quite literally-from the moment they cross the bridge. Every improvement in the quality of services strengthens Jordan's symbolic capital in the West Bank, whereas every deterioration erodes it, regardless of which party ultimately bears operational responsibility.

The third dimension is regional and is frequently overlooked. Border crossings are no longer merely checkpoints; they have become integral nodes within regional supply chains, much like Jordan's crossings with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. This dimension has become increasingly significant as two major regional connectivity initiatives compete to shape the Middle East's transportation landscape for decades to come. The first is the northern branch of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which passes through Jordan toward the Port of Haifa via the Sheikh Hussein Crossing. The second is the Saudi–Turkish memorandum of understanding to revive the Hejaz Railway through Jordan and Syria as an alternative corridor that bypasses Israel entirely. The more efficient and operationally resilient Jordan's network of border crossings becomes-foremost among them the King Hussein Bridge-the greater the Kingdom's ability to position itself within both emerging connectivity frameworks, rather than passively adapting to regional integration models designed elsewhere.

The fourth dimension is directly economic, encompassing the movement of traders, travelers, and commercial goods through the cargo terminal adjacent to the bridge. Bilateral trade between Jordan and Palestine reached approximately US$432 million in 2022, representing a 32 percent increase over the previous year. However, trade volumes subsequently declined as a result of repeated border closures and reduced operating hours following 7 October 2023. Official institutions, together with private-sector stakeholders on both sides, continue to view annual trade exceeding US$1 billion as an attainable long-term objective. That ambition, however, will remain difficult to realize as long as the commercial crossing continues to be managed according to the same operational logic as the passenger terminal, rather than through a dedicated framework that reflects the distinct operational requirements and time sensitivity of freight movement.

The Logic of Mutual Gains

Before turning to the diagnosis, it is important to establish a guiding principle: improving the King Hussein Bridge is not a Jordanian concession made for the benefit of the Palestinian side;

rather, it is a clear case of mutual gains. For Jordan, modernization enhances its image in the West Bank, strengthens its border infrastructure, and generates additional revenues through either direct public operation or partnerships with the private sector. For Palestinians, it delivers tangible improvements in freedom of movement-a fundamental right rather than a privilege to be granted.

Every dinar invested in upgrading the bridge therefore yields a dual return: a political and reputational dividend for Jordan, and a humanitarian and rights-based benefit for Palestinians. Recognizing this shared value should shift the official policy debate away from the question of "who bears the cost" toward the more strategic question of "how the shared benefits can be maximized and distributed"·

Diagnosing the Crisis: Three Interconnected Levels

The most fundamental mistake in discussions of the King Hussein Bridge crisis is to treat it as a single problem. In reality, its underlying causes are distributed across three distinct yet interconnected levels, each characterized by its own institutional logic, responsible actors, and policy solutions.

The First Level: The Sovereign–Political Dimension

From both a legal and functional perspective, the King Hussein Bridge is not a conventional international border crossing comparable to the Sheikh Hussein or Wadi Araba crossings. Rather, it has operated as a humanitarian crossing under the arrangements established after 2001, when Jordan effectively ceased administering the opposite side of the bridge. Under this framework, the Israeli authorities retain control over operating hours, the daily number of permitted crossings, and decisions regarding sudden closures, while neither Jordan nor the Palestinian Authority possesses a direct mechanism to compel changes to these arrangements.

Before 7 October 2023, the bridge operated seven days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and during peak summer seasons it occasionally remained open around the clock. Since then, operating hours have been adjusted according to prevailing security conditions and are often limited to only six to eight hours per day. At the same time, daily processing capacity has fallen from levels that at times approached 5,000 travelers per day to substantially lower figures during periods of restriction. Consequently, demand for travel has been compressed into a much narrower operating window, making congestion virtually inevitable regardless of the efficiency of Jordanian border management.

Jordan is not entirely without avenues of action in addressing this reality. A petition has been filed before the Israeli High Court seeking the restoration of 24-hour operations, as existed prior to the war. This legal effort has been accompanied by a Palestinian public campaign under the slogan "Our Right: The Bridge 24/7", as well as diplomatic correspondence from European actors urging Israel to expand the bridge's operating hours. To date, however, these efforts have not resulted in any substantive change. This constitutes the foremost political challenge that should remain at the center of Jordan's diplomatic agenda, because even the most effective administrative reforms will merely manage a structurally constrained crossing capacity unless the underlying political restrictions are addressed.

The Second Level: Administrative and Institutional Governance

At this level, Jordan exercises the greatest degree of control and, consequently, bears the highest level of direct responsibility for addressing operational shortcomings. Three distinct issues intersect here, each requiring separate analysis rather than being collectively reduced to broad labels such as "corruption" or "brokers."

The first concerns the booking platform operated by JETT, the exclusive passenger transport provider on the Jordanian side of the bridge. The company itself acknowledged that certain employees had abused their authority to modify reservations by cancelling legitimate bookings and reselling them at significantly higher prices to stranded travelers who lacked reservations. Although the Ministry of Interior subsequently introduced stricter oversight measures, the underlying problem extends beyond the company itself. It lies in the absence of a clear institutional separation between the authority responsible for issuing security clearance for travel-a sovereign governmental function-and the entity responsible for providing commercial booking and transportation services, which should be subject to competition and robust regulatory oversight. This raises a broader governance question: why should the issuance of travel authorization not be entrusted directly to a sovereign Jordanian authority, such as the Bridge Security Administration, instead of remaining intertwined with the operations of a commercial transport company, regardless of its credibility?

The company's financial performance further underscores the need for a broader policy discussion. In 2025, JETT reported a turnaround from a loss of approximately JD 229,000 in the previous year to consolidated profits exceeding JD 2.29 million. Revenues generated specifically from bridge transport services increased by approximately JD 11.7 million. These figures warrant a transparent public debate over whether the existing monopoly on booking and transportation primarily serves Palestinian travelers or instead benefits from the scarcity of available seats.

The second issue concerns the so-called "traders"-a term that, in practice, often masks organized smuggling activities. According to broadly consistent Jordanian and Palestinian estimates, hundreds of individuals move daily through coordinated networks that exploit congestion at the crossing to transport goods, particularly cigarettes and pharmaceuticals, often in coordination with the duty-free market located on the Jordanian side of the bridge. In response, Jordan's Ministry of Interior took the significant step of prohibiting 468 individuals suspected of involvement in cigarette smuggling and price-arbitrage activities from entering the Kingdom. The measure produced an immediate and noticeable improvement in the regularity of passenger flows during the weeks that followed. Yet security enforcement alone cannot provide a lasting solution as long as the structural incentives remain intact: substantial price differentials between the two markets, the presence of a duty-free zone adjacent to the crossing with insufficient regulatory oversight, and limited public awareness that many ordinary travelers transport quantities of cigarettes, tobacco products, and medicines that frequently exceed personal-use thresholds.

The third-and arguably most consequential-issue at this level concerns the duty-free zone adjacent to the bridge on the Jordanian side. Representatives of the Palestinian private sector have formally called for its permanent closure, arguing that it no longer serves a legitimate commercial purpose and has instead evolved into a conduit for organized smuggling. Estimates circulating within Palestinian business circles suggest that the resulting losses to the Palestinian economy may amount to hundreds of millions of Jordanian dinars annually, while the Jordanian operator of the zone derives comparatively modest financial returns. Although these estimates require independent verification, the apparent disparity between the limited domestic economic gains and the alleged scale of harm inflicted on the Palestinian economy warrants an urgent official review, accompanied by a transparent customs and regulatory assessment, rather than continued reliance on the status quo.

The Third Level: Infrastructure and Operational Capacity

The third level is the least politically complex and the one most amenable to relatively rapid improvement, provided that the necessary political will and financial resources are available. Today, the **King Hussein Bridge** operates at only a fraction of its former operational capacity. Neither the passenger waiting areas on the Jordanian side nor the reception facilities at the

Jericho terminal on the Palestinian side were designed to accommodate the current volume of travelers during the peak summer season.

Paradoxically, field observations from the Jordanian side indicate that the principal bottleneck lies on the Israeli side of the crossing, where the passenger terminal and the commercial cargo terminal operate within the same constrained infrastructure. This limited processing capacity creates the crossing's primary choke point, regardless of the quality or efficiency of services provided by the Jordanian authorities.

The scale of the problem was acknowledged publicly by Jordan's Minister of Interior, who described the condition of the services as **"garbage"**-a rare and unusually candid official admission that should serve as a catalyst for reform rather than remain merely a public acknowledgment of existing shortcomings.

At the same time, this reality does not absolve Jordan of responsibility for upgrading its own facilities. A previous **US$150 million** contract awarded to an Indian company to construct a new border crossing complex was suspended following the events of **7 October 2023**, and although alternative proposals have since been discussed, none has yet been translated into an implementation plan supported by a binding timetable and clearly defined milestones.

Why Do the Same Solutions Recur Without Resolving the Crisis?

The deeper problem is that many of the solutions currently under discussion-including extending operating hours, separating commercial freight operations from passenger processing, expanding private-sector participation, and establishing a unified sovereign border-crossing authority-are not new proposals. They were presented in detail by the Politics and Society Institute in an earlier policy paper only a few months ago and have now reappeared in almost identical form. This repetition does not indicate a flaw in the diagnosis; rather, it demonstrates that the central challenge is not a deficit of knowledge but a deficit of implementation.

Policy Recommendations: From Diagnosis to Executive Action

The following recommendations are organized according to their implementation horizon. Each recommendation should be accompanied by a designated lead institution, a defined implementation timeline, and measurable performance indicators to facilitate monitoring, evaluate progress, and ensure institutional accountability.

First: Immediate Measures (Within 90 Days)

Recommendation	Responsible Institution(s)	Implementation Timeline	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
Separate the sovereign authority responsible for issuing travel security clearance from the commercial booking process, enabling a government authority to issue travel authorization and booking references directly.	Bridge Security Administration / Ministry of Interior	Within 90 days	Formal issuance of a government decision transferring responsibility for travel authorization, and the elimination of complaints related to reservation manipulation and resale during the peak travel season.
Expand security restrictions to cover all documented smugglers and establish a direct Jordanian–Palestinian security coordination mechanism to prevent offenders from circumventing enforcement through procedural identity changes.	Ministry of Interior, in coordination with the relevant Palestinian authorities	Within 90 days	Monthly updates to the prohibited-persons list, accompanied by stable or declining rates of repeat violations.
Introduce a real-time notification system (SMS messages or a mobile application) to alert travelers immediately in the event of sudden bridge closures or operational disruptions.	Bridge Security Administration, in coordination with JETT	Within 60 days	Full operational deployment of the notification service and measurement of the proportion of travelers receiving alerts before departing for the bridge.
Establish dedicated and publicly announced processing lanes for elderly travelers, children, patients, and humanitarian emergency cases outside the mandatory booking system.	Bridge Security Administration	Within 60 days	Publication of clear operational procedures for priority categories and regular monitoring of their average waiting times.
Introduce and publicly communicate a mandatory arrival window requiring passengers to arrive **30–60 minutes** before their scheduled departure, supported by a comprehensive public awareness campaign.	Ministry of Interior / JETT	Within 30 days	Measurable reduction in the number of passengers gathering at the terminal several hours before their scheduled departure times.

Second: Medium-Term Reforms (Within 12 Months)

Recommendation	Responsible Institution(s)	Implementation Timeline	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
Conduct a transparent official review comparing the financial returns generated by the duty-free zone with the estimated economic losses incurred by the Palestinian economy, as the basis for a policy decision on whether to close the zone or restructure it under a comprehensive electronic customs oversight system.	Joint Committee comprising the Ministry of Finance and the Jordan Customs Department	Within 6–9 months	Publication of a comprehensive public review report, followed by the issuance of an executive decision determining the future of the duty-free zone.

Recommendation	Responsible Institution(s)	Implementation Timeline	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
Consolidate the administrative oversight of all Jordanian border crossings under a single sovereign authority with overall responsibility and accountability for border-crossing performance.	Prime Ministry	Within 12 months	Formal establishment of the authority through a government decision, with clearly defined executive powers and institutional responsibilities.
Reactivate bilateral coordination mechanisms by establishing a Jordanian–Palestinian committee for day-to-day operational coordination and a Jordanian–Israeli committee to address operating hours and crossing capacity, with facilitation by international partners, particularly the European Union.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates	Within 6 months	Regular documented coordination meetings and the resumption of formal negotiation channels that have remained inactive since 2023.
Engage the private sector to develop passenger service facilities outside the bridge compound and implement the previously signed agreement between the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Royal Jordanian Airlines.	Ministry of Public Works and Housing / Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs	Within 12 months	Operational opening of the new service facilities and full implementation of the provisions of the previously suspended agreement.

Third: Long-Term Strategic Reform (Within Three Years)

Recommendation	Responsible Institution(s)	Implementation Timeline	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
Maintain the restoration of 24-hour bridge operations as a top-tier Jordanian–Israeli negotiating priority, pursued in parallel with the ongoing Palestinian legal proceedings.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates / The Royal Hashemite Court	Within 3 years	Adoption of stable, publicly announced operating hours that are no longer subject to frequent security-related fluctuations.
Systematically engage international partners-particularly the European Union and the United States-to advocate for the issue on the basis of international legal rights and freedom of movement, rather than through a purely humanitarian framing.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates	Within 3 years	Formal incorporation of the bridge issue into the political dialogue agenda with these international partners.
Establish an interministerial task force to align Jordan's border-crossing policy with emerging regional connectivity initiatives, including the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the proposed revival of the Hejaz Railway.	Prime Ministry / Ministry of Transport	Within 18–24 months	Publication of a comprehensive national strategy for Jordan's land border-crossing network.
Achieve the complete physical and operational separation of the	Ministry of Public Works and Housing /	Within 3 years	Full operational separation of passenger and freight facilities,

Recommendation	Responsible Institution(s)	Implementation Timeline	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
commercial freight crossing from the passenger terminal through dedicated infrastructure, management systems, and independent booking platforms.	Jordan Customs Department		supported by an independent booking and processing system for commercial cargo.
Launch a joint Jordanian–Palestinian strategic communications initiative to highlight the operational constraints imposed on the crossing by Israeli policies and practices.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates / Government Communication and Media Directorate	Within 12 months	Implementation of a documented public communication campaign supported by measurable outreach, engagement, and media impact indicators.

Conclusion: The Cost of Continuing to Manage Symptoms

All stakeholders involved in this issue possess a highly accurate understanding of the bridge's underlying challenges. Precisely because the diagnosis is so well established, the persistence of the crisis is increasingly difficult to justify. The issue no longer requires additional studies; it requires binding executive decisions supported by a clear implementation timetable and an effective accountability framework. Every month of delay in implementing the recommendations outlined above comes at a direct political cost to Jordan's standing in the West Bank.

The cost of inaction is further amplified by the fact that the current regional window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely. Jordan finds itself at a pivotal moment of strategic repositioning between two competing regional connectivity initiatives: one that links the region through Israel, and another that bypasses Israel altogether. This transitional phase offers the Kingdom a rare degree of negotiating leverage. Once these initiatives become institutionalized and their routes are finalized, that opportunity will diminish-particularly if Jordan's border infrastructure has not been sufficiently modernized to accommodate either scenario.

The question facing Jordanian decision-makers today is no longer what should be done. The necessary policy options have been identified, debated, and repeatedly articulated over many years. The only remaining question is whether the executive resolve exists to transform this well-established diagnosis into irreversible policy action. More than any additional study, the answer to that question will determine whether the King Hussein Bridge continues to function as a recurring bottleneck managed through seasonal crisis response, or evolves into what it has the potential to become: a strategic national asset that advances the long-term interests of both Jordan and Palestine.

References

According to the periodic announcements issued by the **Bridge Security Administration** throughout **2025–2026**, the operating hours of the **King Hussein Bridge** have changed frequently in response to security arrangements and special occasions. On most days, operations were limited to between **six and eight hours**, compared with **twelve hours or more** prior to **October 2023**.

Al Jazeera Arabic, *"The King Hussein Bridge Crisis: Why Are Waiting Lines So Long?"*, July 2026.

Mubasher.info, *"JETT Returns to Annual Profitability in 2025 as Operating Revenues Increase"*, based on financial statements filed with the **Amman Stock Exchange**.

Al-Haqeeqa International News Agency, *"Source: Decision Issued to Ban 468 Individuals from Crossing via the King Hussein Bridge"*, 30 June 2026.

Estimates circulated by representatives of the Palestinian private sector and Palestinian official sources. At the time of preparing this paper, these estimates could not be independently verified through publicly available official sources. They are therefore cited solely to illustrate the scale of the reported dispute rather than as confirmed statistical evidence.

Statements by the **Jordanian Minister of Interior**, as reported by **Al Jazeera Arabic** and **Quds Press**, July 2026.