



The King Warned... Has the State Prepared ? When the King's Speech Outpaces State Institutions

Politics and Society Institute (PSI)

Ali Hijazi

Note: This paper draws on a discussion session organized by the Politics and Society Institute (PSI), titled "From the Royal Address to Policy Response: Jordan's Options in the Face of Israeli and Regional Shifts," which brought together a distinguished group of political figures, experts, and academics. The paper incorporates the perspectives and questions raised during the session, alongside relevant research and documentary sources, to develop an in-depth analysis and assess Jordan's strategic options for the next phase.



Introduction: The Problem the Speech Created Within the State

When King Abdullah II warned of the transformations unfolding in the West Bank and southern Syria, and placed displacement, water, and borders within the framework of Jordanian national security, the most important question was directed inward as much as outward: what should change within the Jordanian state following this warning? The Kingdom now faces a strategic environment in which some of the assumptions that have governed its relationship with Israel are losing their validity, while the risks affecting geography, demography, and resources are expanding. Under such conditions, institutions' ability to identify threats early, translate that assessment into practical options, and build a cohesive domestic front becomes decisive in determining Jordan's room for maneuver and its capacity to protect its interests.

The significance of King Abdullah II's address to the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September 2026 lies in the fact that it confronted the Jordanian state with a problem more profound than Israel itself: can state institutions absorb the change in the definition of the threat articulated by the head of state and reorganize their instruments accordingly? The issue is neither the forcefulness of the language nor the degree of anger conveyed by the speech. In previous years, Jordan had employed strong language in response to the war in Gaza, settlement expansion, and displacement, repeatedly affirming that an "alternative homeland" and forced displacement constitute red lines. What distinguished the 2026 address was the way in which elements previously handled as separate files were brought together into a single framework: the West Bank, displacement, settlements, southern Syria, water resources, the absence of international deterrence, sanctions, and Jordanian national security. This is more than a catalogue of crises; it is a redefinition of the environment in which Jordan operates.

The strategic significance becomes apparent when three central propositions in the address are read together: Israeli policies in the West Bank are becoming permanent facts on the ground; international instruments exist, yet states are choosing not to employ them; and developments in Syria and concerning water resources affect Jordan's national security. Taken together, these propositions move the address from the conventional defense of Palestinian rights into the realm of threat assessment. From this perspective, the references to sanctions, asset freezes, embargoes, and diplomatic isolation matter because they link diagnosis to instruments of action. The language of national security matters because it brings an external issue into the sphere of interests the state is obliged to protect. Equally significant, the suggestion that some Israeli trends will not change with a change of government calls for revisiting a long-standing assumption in Jordanian thinking: that the problem is largely political and personal, and that Netanyahu's departure could restore the relationship to its former trajectory.

The dilemma is that the speech moved faster than the domestic debate. Across large parts of Jordan's political and media landscape, it was met with praise and expressions of support—an understandable reaction to a forceful royal address on an issue commanding broad social consensus. Yet this response leaves the more difficult question unanswered: what changed in state policy the following morning? If displacement is an imminent threat, what has changed in the early-warning system? If water is a component of national security, what has changed in assessments of dependency? If Israeli policy exhibits structural features that extend beyond the



current government, what has changed in the monitoring of Israeli elections and in the definition of potential partners inside Israel? And if sanctions were deliberately mentioned as an instrument, who is preparing the legal, diplomatic, and economic case for their use? Without answers, the speech risks becoming an elevated political benchmark beneath which a bureaucracy continues to operate according to an older doctrine.

Two competing tendencies are evident within the state and the political sphere. The first reads the address as a call to change Jordan's approach toward Israel, arguing that the accumulation of developments in the West Bank, Syria, and water relations has exhausted the logic of managing disagreements within the old peace framework. The second begins with the limits of Jordanian power: Israel possesses military superiority and exceptional American support; Jordan depends on the United States economically and in security matters; and Arab strategic depth cannot be taken for granted. It therefore treats the address as a strong statement of position and concludes that a confrontation beyond the Kingdom's capabilities would impose costs greater than its benefits. Both tendencies capture part of the reality, but each becomes mistaken when elevated into a comprehensive policy. Changing the approach does not mean entering an open confrontation; limited power does not mean a lack of options. A middle power does not measure its capacity by asking whether it can defeat a stronger adversary. It measures it by its ability to prevent that adversary from imposing an environment that narrows its freedom of decision, and by its capacity to combine legal, diplomatic, economic, and security instruments so that encroaching upon its interests becomes more costly.

This is the paper's central argument: Jordan faces the declining validity of part of the doctrine that has governed its relationship with Israel since the peace treaty. That doctrine has rested on preserving functional cooperation, separating bilateral issues from the Palestinian question wherever possible, assuming that Israel's security establishment recognizes the strategic value of Jordan's stability, and relying on the United States to prevent Israeli policies from reaching a point that threatens Jordan's vital interests. These elements have not disappeared entirely, and some remain necessary, but reliance upon them now carries greater risk. The King's address can be read as an attempt to compel both the state and the international system to move beyond managing the consequences of change toward influencing the processes that produce those consequences.



What Changed in the King's Address?

An examination of the 2026 address through the methods of political discourse analysis reveals that its most significant meaning lies not in any single sentence, but in the sequencing of arguments, the choice of vocabulary, the movement of some issues from the margins to the center, and the omission of terms that featured prominently in earlier speeches. In Norman Fairclough's approach, discourse is at once a linguistic and social event, involving the text, the practices of its production and reception, and the political structure within which it operates. Analyzing the King's address therefore requires more than identifying what he said: it requires asking why he used this wording, at this moment, before this audience, and how the message was reinterpreted within Jordan and abroad. From Teun van Dijk's perspective, overarching themes, levels of detail, explicit statements, and implicit meanings help construct an audience's mental model. Ruth Wodak adds the historical and intertextual dimension: the significance of a statement changes when situated within a sequence of earlier speeches and positions. Piotr Cap's theory of "proximization" explains how a threat is linguistically transferred from an external space into the domestic sphere—spatially, temporally, and axiologically—so that developments occurring "there" acquire direct significance "here." Securitization theory provides a further decisive criterion: defining an issue as a national-security threat opens the way to instruments different from those of routine politics, but making that transition effective requires an audience and institutions that understand and act on the new definition.

The address's opening appeal to "attention" is the organizing key to the text. The King did not begin with Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, or even the United Nations. He began with the world's capacity to pay attention. This rhetorical move initially appears general, but quickly becomes a political indictment: the international community chose to contain the conflict rather than confront it; what was treated as temporary became permanent; and what became permanent hardened into policy. Within this structure, inaction becomes a political act rather than the absence of action. The idea of "choice" recurs in substance when the address turns to sanctions: international paralysis does not stem from a shortage of instruments; the instruments are available, and refraining from using them is a decision. This proposition strikes at the heart of the international order on which Jordan has relied for decades, suggesting that international legality continues to exist on paper while its enforcement remains selective.

In the 2024 address, the central themes were the crisis of international legitimacy, impunity, protection of Palestinians, and rejection of displacement and an alternative homeland. The speech stated clearly that forced displacement constitutes a war crime, placing the crisis of the United Nations and double standards in the application of law at the forefront. In 2025, the address went a step further: the current Israeli government was described as unwilling to pursue peace, calls for "Greater Israel" were presented as threats to the sovereignty of regional states, and the two-state solution was explicitly and centrally identified as the way forward—an independent, viable Palestinian state alongside Israel. In 2026, the structure changed. The phrase "two-state solution" did not appear in the General Assembly address itself, although the Palestinian state, the Arab Peace Initiative, just peace, diplomacy, and Palestinian steadfastness all did. On the same day, however, the King affirmed in his meeting with the UN Secretary-General the establishment of an



independent Palestinian state “on the basis of the two-state solution.” Its absence from the General Assembly text therefore does not signify a reversal of the official position. The implication is more profound: the two-state solution remained the official objective, while the operational focus of the language shifted to safeguarding the conditions necessary to make that objective viable.

This shift matters because the settlement formula has lost its ability to structure reality. For years, the international community could repeat the phrase “two-state solution” while settlements expanded and the geographic landscape changed. The 2026 address reverses the causal sequence: before debating the form of the solution, it is necessary to prevent the destruction of the land, institutions, and population on which that solution depends. Hence the appearance of expressions such as “forced displacement,” “de facto annexation,” “sanctions,” “asset freezes,” “embargoes,” and “diplomatic isolation.” Peace remains the objective, but shifts from an everyday instrument to an end that requires more forceful means of protection. The address thus did not abandon peace as an official political goal; it challenged the ritualistic version of peace in which the formula is repeated as facts on the ground move in the opposite direction.

This is also where the reclassification of actions in the address becomes significant. The King rejects sanitized language: home demolitions are not presented simply as law enforcement; land seizures are not reduced to matters of registration; checkpoints are not treated as neutral security infrastructure; and settler violence is not dismissed as peripheral disorder. In Robert Entman’s theory of framing, discourse defines a problem, diagnoses its causes, makes evaluations, and indicates remedies by selecting and emphasizing elements of reality. The King’s address does precisely this: the problem is not a series of isolated incidents; the cause is an accumulated policy; the judgment is that it is unlawful and pushes people to leave; and the remedy requires instruments that raise the costs. The issue thereby moves from asking “Are violations occurring?” to asking “What policy produces these violations, and what material objective does it serve?”

The progression from the West Bank to Syria, and then to “our northern borders” and “our water security,” exemplifies what Cap calls spatial and temporal proximization. The threat begins in the Palestinian territories, extends into an Israeli conception of the regional space, reaches southern Syria, and then touches the Kingdom’s borders and resources. At that point, Israel is framed in the speech as an actor directly reshaping Jordan’s security environment, rather than merely a party to a conflict in which Jordan acts as mediator. The use of “national security” raises the significance of the argument. When, at a multilateral meeting that same day, the King reiterated that Israeli actions in Syria constituted a “direct threat to Jordan’s national security,” the formulation moved beyond the rhetorical framework of the General Assembly address to become a political message delivered in the presence of the US president and Arab and Muslim leaders.

This also helps explain the speech’s tone. “Anger” is an inadequate psychological description. The text is better understood as an argument shaped by accumulated developments and the exhaustion of patience with earlier assumptions. Momentary anger usually focuses on a particular incident or government. The 2026 address extends the time horizon: present developments form part of a trajectory; facts consolidated on the ground may outlast changes of government; and the international community has repeatedly adopted a pattern of management and inaction. Reading



the address as a momentary outburst therefore diminishes its analytical significance. An outburst is transient, whereas the speech builds its argument around permanence.

The reference to sanctions offers the clearest test of this interpretation. The King could have confined himself to calling for international action. Instead, the choice of specific terms—sanctions, asset freezes, bans, and diplomatic isolation—shifts the message from exhortation to a repertoire of instruments. The address neither specifies Jordanian sanctions nor sets out their costs or sequencing. That space is either deliberately left open or reserved for executive policy. The speech's function is to create political and normative space for the use of these tools. The relevant question in Jordan, therefore, is not whether the King was threatening comprehensive sanctions the following day. It is why sanctions entered the vocabulary of the royal address, and what the executive branch must develop to make them usable, independently or in coalition.

Even the address to Christianity carries a strategic dimension. The speech rejected a portrayal of the conflict as a war of religions and placed the protection of Christianity, its communities, and its heritage in its historic homeland alongside the defense of authentic Islam and the holy sites. It is difficult to establish that this formulation was directed specifically at American evangelical constituencies supportive of Trump or Israel. Its potential resonance within that symbolic sphere, however, is clear. It challenges a binary narrative of "Judaism and Christianity versus Islam" and presents Jordan as a guardian of the indigenous Eastern Christian presence and of Islam's historic heritage in Jerusalem. The message reaches Western Christian audiences, churches, and segments of American society that interpret the Middle East through religious categories. Its political value would grow if a sentence in a speech became a sustained institutional network linking churches, universities, and Christian communities in the United States and Europe.

The absence of alliances from the speech deserves the same attention as the presence of sanctions. The King did not place Jordan within an Arab, American, or European bloc, nor did he present the regional defense network as the answer to the threat. This omission does not signify a lack of alliances: events on the same day demonstrated close coordination with the US administration and Arab and Muslim leaders. Rather, the speech appears to define Jordan's interests before identifying the alignment through which they might be defended. At a time when the American security umbrella is changing, Gulf states are exploring multiple arrangements, and Europe and Washington differ over instruments of pressure on Israel, tying Jordanian security to a single axis would unnecessarily constrain its choices. The address places "What threatens us?" before "With whom do we stand?"—a sound ordering for a middle power situated among competing networks.

Foreign coverage itself diverged over the meaning of the address, and that divergence is instructive. The Times of Israel highlighted the King's warning that Jordan would act to protect its borders and water and described his remarks on the Israeli presence in Syria as a warning about a "regional threat." The Jerusalem Post offered a more conventional reading: Jordan has criticized Israel at the United Nations for years, and the clearest novelty lay in bringing Syria into the assessment. This Israeli reading qualifies the notion of a doctrinal rupture and reminds us that much of Jordan's language has precedents. By contrast, a Foreign Policy analysis published weeks before the address identified a deeper shift in Amman: among Jordanian elites and officials



interviewed by the author, fear of West Bank annexation and Palestinian displacement had become more existential than the immediate Iranian threat. The speech's significance lies between these readings. Its language emerged from an ongoing transformation and brought it together in a single framework articulated by the head of state.

Jordan's official and semi-official press emphasized the strength of the position and the clarity of its priorities. Members of parliament and parliamentary blocs noted that the speech placed national security, water, and borders alongside Palestinian rights. This reception lent domestic legitimacy to the message, but also revealed a gap: much of the coverage stopped at description and endorsement rather than proceeding to scrutinize institutions. Criticism of this superficial treatment does not mean that the coverage failed to recognize the speech's force. It recognized the first level of meaning while leaving aside the second: the implications for doctrine and practice.

Jordan's official and semi-official press emphasized the strength of the position and the clarity of its priorities. Members of parliament and parliamentary blocs noted that the speech placed national security, water, and borders alongside Palestinian rights. This reception lent domestic legitimacy to the message, but also revealed a gap: much of the coverage stopped at description and endorsement rather than proceeding to scrutinize institutions. Criticism of this superficial treatment does not mean that the coverage failed to recognize the speech's force. It recognized the first level of meaning while leaving aside the second: the implications for doctrine and practice.

The address also speaks to two further audiences within the region. The first is Jordan's political elite. Its implicit message is that the established approach to managing Israel is no longer adequate if it depends on awaiting a change of government or assuming that Israeli and American restraints will remain constant. The second audience consists of Israeli currents that regard peace with Jordan as a strategic asset. To them, the message is that continued expansion and pressure in the West Bank, on water, and in Syria confront the Jordanian state with an angry public and reduce policymakers' capacity to preserve the relationship itself. This is not an appeal for sympathy from the "Israeli left." It is an attempt to restore the cost to Jordan to Israel's strategic calculations: if some emerging Israeli elites treat the Kingdom's stability as a given, Israeli policy must be shown capable of turning that constant into a variable.

From this perspective, the greatest deficiency following the speech lies within Jordan: its reception. Securitization theory holds that declaring a threat is insufficient; the declaration must be understood and accepted by audiences and institutions and followed by a reorientation of resources and practices. A domestic response confined to celebration leaves this process incomplete. If the King argues that the world has chosen inaction and Jordanian institutions likewise stop at praising his address, the same problem is reproduced on a smaller scale: recognizing a danger without building the capacity to alter its trajectory.



The Israel Jordan Faces: Has the Strategy of Waiting for a Change of Government Run Its Course?

One proposition warrants particular scrutiny: “Israeli policies will not change when governments change.” Taken literally, it implies a determinism that experience does not support. Israeli governments differ in the scale of settlement activity, their handling of settler violence, their relations with the Palestinian Authority, and their approaches to Jerusalem, Washington, Syria, and Jordan. Yet disregarding this proposition would return Jordan to another illusion: that Netanyahu’s departure could restore a period in which the two-state solution occupied a central place in Israeli political thinking. Current Israeli evidence supports a more nuanced interpretation: the intensity of the threat may change considerably with the government, while some structural trends have expanded beyond the current coalition.

An April 2026 study by Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) used unusually explicit language from within Israel’s own research establishment. It described a “conceptual and practical shift” in the West Bank centered on “absolute security,” the application of sovereignty, foreclosing a political settlement, weakening the Palestinian Authority, and displacing Palestinians, with policy moving closer to the principles of the “Decisive Plan” associated with Smotrich. The importance of this source is that it is neither a Palestinian statement nor an international human rights report. It is an Israeli critique emerging from a security school that views these policies as harmful to Israel itself, pushing it toward a one-state reality and greater isolation. For Jordan, this means that the argument about structural transformation rests on more than an external Jordanian assessment: elements within the Israeli establishment identify a similar shift and warn against it for Israeli reasons.

Israeli public opinion provides another indicator that is difficult to ignore. The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) index for August 2026 found that 38 percent of Jewish Israelis selected annexation of the entire West Bank as their preferred and achievable long-term objective, compared with 35 percent who chose forms of partition. More tellingly, 22 percent selected a scenario involving annexation of all the territory and the relocation of its Arab inhabitants to other countries, while 14 percent favored annexation combined with autonomy without citizenship. These figures do not establish that displacement has become a consensual policy. They do show that ideas previously associated with an ideological fringe have gained sufficient public presence to become political resources for parties.

The Israeli opposition itself illustrates the change. Gadi Eisenkot, a former chief of staff and prominent electoral contender, described belief in a two-state solution after October 7 as “illusory,” while opposing the E1 project as a costly mistake for Israel and criticizing settler violence. This combination is highly consequential for Jordan. A different government might restrain settlers, reduce friction, restore channels of communication, and deal more cautiously with Jordan, yet still reject the political trajectory that Amman regards as the foundation of long-term stability. This is precisely the meaning of the “different shades of right” identified by INSS in its assessment of Egyptian and Jordanian perspectives ahead of the elections: an alternative may be more pragmatic and less ideological without automatically restoring the environment that existed before October 7.



At the same time, a distinct school within Israel's security establishment considers peace with Jordan a strategic asset. Another INSS study, published in March 2026 during the war with Iran, emphasized the importance of peace and military coordination with Jordan and called for repairing political relations. This difference should inform Jordanian strategy, because Jordan gains little by portraying Israel as a single, closed bloc. Within Israel there is a real contest over the meaning of security: one current views territorial reach, expansion, sovereignty, and decisive victory as instruments of security; another regards regional stability, the relationship with Jordan, coordination, and reduced friction as strategic assets. An effective Jordanian policy would raise the costs associated with the first current while strengthening the arguments and political resources available to the second, without making the Kingdom's security dependent on its electoral success.

The problem is that an older Jordanian assumption relied on Israel's "deep state" as a safeguard. An INSS study indicated that Jordan had assumed Israel's security establishment understood the need to preserve the Kingdom's stability and that confidence in this assumption was no longer equally warranted. This does not mean that the entire Israeli security establishment has turned against Jordan. It means that its ability to constrain political decision-making and impose its understanding of Israel's interests has become uncertain. Since October 7, prolonged war, the political and demographic rise of religious-nationalist right-wing currents, the expansion of Israeli civilian involvement in West Bank administration, and the normalization of sovereignty rhetoric have altered the balance of power within the Israeli state.

Consider the proposition that "Israel does not want a fragile Jordan." It remains true within an important strand of Israeli security thinking, but has lost much of its reassuring force for Jordan. The relevant question is not what "Israel," in the singular, wants, but which Israel makes the decisions at the critical moment. A security establishment may regard a stable Jordan as an eastern buffer and a strategic interest. An annexationist current may value control over the West Bank or the imposition of ideologically driven arrangements more highly than the costs of damaging relations with Amman. An electoral politician may prefer a short-term domestic gain over long-term regional stability. When decision-making centers and sources of legitimacy multiply, reliance on Israel's supposed objective interest in Jordanian stability becomes less secure.

This leads to a reassessment of Jordan's regional value. The United States continues to regard the Kingdom as a critically important military, logistical, and political partner, and the war with Iran has heightened the importance of its geography, facilities, and defenses. What has changed is the type of value. In earlier periods, Jordan served as a channel of communication, an intermediary, and a stable buffer between Israel and the Levant. Today, Israel can communicate directly with Arab states, and the United States can manage multiple, overlapping alliances, while Jordan has become a node for air defense, deployment, logistics, and border containment. Its value has increased in some functions while declining in its former role as an "indispensable intermediary." This shift contains a paradox: the more central Jordan becomes to US operational infrastructure, the greater its ability to seek protection and support, but also the more attractive a target it becomes to Washington's adversaries.



Waiting for Israeli elections is therefore an exceptionally weak strategy. Elections matter as a variable, but they are not a plan. Jordan must build an approach that can operate under a Netanyahu government, a more pragmatic security-oriented government, or political deadlock. Any new government should be judged against concrete indicators: E1, settlements, settler violence, financial and institutional relations with the Palestinian Authority, Jerusalem, water, and the Israeli presence in southern Syria. If behavior improves, the Jordanian response can adjust. If the names change but the underlying trends remain, the revised Jordanian doctrine should remain in force. In this way, Jordanian policy can become more stable than Israel's political cycle.



Displacement: The Threat That Begins Before It Reaches the Border

Displacement is the issue that demands the greatest precision, because imprecision invites two opposite errors: false reassurance that waits for written evidence of a mass-transfer plan, and alarmism that predicts hundreds of thousands of people will soon cross into Jordan without support from publicly available evidence. A more rigorous strategic reading begins with the recognition that displacement is neither a single event nor something that requires a decision explicitly labeled “transfer.” International law itself defines forcible transfer more broadly. In its 2024 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice affirmed that a transfer may be forcible when people have no genuine choice but to leave, even without the direct use of physical force, and linked this to home demolitions, restrictions on residence and movement, land confiscation, and the reallocation of land for settlements. For Jordan, the essential point is that early warning must begin when conditions of expulsion are created, rather than when population movements reach the border.

Open-source evidence available through October 7, 2026, establishes that forcible displacement within the West Bank is an existing and accelerating threat in particular areas, while a broader structure of annexation and territorial fragmentation continues to advance. A March 2026 report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights documented the displacement of more than 36,000 Palestinians during its reporting period, along with 1,732 incidents of settler violence resulting in injury or damage; it linked settlement expansion, annexation, and violence to widespread displacement. In May, the Office warned of an “imminent risk of forcible transfer” in Khan al-Ahmar in connection with the E1 project, which envisages 3,401 housing units and threatens 18 Palestinian communities. In September, further tenders and measures moved E1 closer to implementation. These indicators justify treating displacement as an ongoing process. Cross-border mass displacement into Jordan, however, represents a higher threshold that the available open sources do not establish as having entered large-scale implementation.

The distinction between these thresholds does not diminish the threat; it makes it possible to manage. If Jordan waits for the final threshold, it will already have lost valuable time. The process may unfold in successive stages: transferring administrative powers from military rule to Israeli civilian bodies; registering land and expanding the category of “state land”; integrating settlements into Israeli infrastructure; constructing roads and barriers that separate Palestinian communities; increasing settler violence; restricting residents’ ability to build and access water and agricultural land; financially strangling municipalities and the Palestinian Authority; driving internal displacement from peripheral areas toward cities; and, ultimately, creating economic and security deterioration that makes emigration an increasingly attractive option. At each stage, the incentives shift from “staying despite the cost” toward “leaving as a means of survival.”

The idea of “cantons” deserves serious attention rather than dismissal as a rhetorical metaphor. The underlying danger is the emergence of densely populated but poorly connected Palestinian enclaves, surrounded by Israeli-controlled areas, roads, and settlements, with an authority that administers the population more than it governs the land. Such an arrangement permits extensive functional annexation without a formal declaration of comprehensive annexation. A Palestinian



state may persist as a term in international diplomacy while gradually losing the territorial and sovereign foundations of statehood. For Jordan, this scenario may be more dangerous than a single law announcing annexation, because it unfolds below the threshold of a crisis likely to trigger a major international response. Each step appears manageable in isolation; together, the steps produce a fundamentally different reality.

This is the significance of the King's warning that the "illusion" lies in treating Israeli rejection of Palestinian statehood as a position that might change while irreversible realities are being entrenched on the ground. The statement should be read as a warning about time. Conventional diplomacy assumes the future remains open to negotiation; a policy of imposing facts seeks to close off that future before negotiations begin. Each passing year need not bring a solution closer: it may reduce the number of solutions still possible. Repeatedly celebrating the two-state solution can therefore become a danger in itself when it postpones action to preserve the material conditions required for it.

Why does this process rise to the level of an existential threat for Jordan? Because it strikes at four foundations simultaneously. First, it undermines the possibility of a viable Palestinian state, which Amman regards as a political, geographic, and demographic barrier against the "alternative homeland" scenario. Second, in a crisis it could generate population pressure toward the east, whose implications extend far beyond refugee numbers to the economy, political representation, identity, the labor market, water, housing, and public finances. Third, it could leave Jordan's western frontier directly facing a broader and more heavily militarized system of Israeli control. Fourth, it places the Hashemite custodianship and Jerusalem within a contest over sovereignty and identity that extends beyond the religious administration of holy sites.

Jordan therefore needs to change how it measures displacement. The least useful indicator is the number of people who have crossed the border after the critical moment has passed. More important are indicators that precede it: rates of internal displacement from villages and communities; the number of communities deprived of access to grazing land or water; the pace of home demolitions; settlement expansion and connectivity; changes to residency and permit systems; the scale of settler violence and the pattern of protection or prosecution of perpetrators; the Palestinian Authority's ability to pay salaries; unemployment in sensitive areas; changes in movement across the King Hussein Bridge; growing numbers of departures without return; offers or arrangements for migration to third countries; and shifts in Israeli discourse from "encouraging emigration" to government mechanisms that finance or facilitate it. When several such indicators rise together, the threat moves from a structural condition to an operational one.

Within this framework, support for Palestinian steadfastness ceases to be ceremonial and becomes a Jordanian national-security policy. Steadfastness requires more than dispersed, general assistance. It entails identifying the areas where continued Palestinian presence changes the territorial balance: E1, the Jordan Valley, Jerusalem, communities threatened by violence or eviction, and places heavily dependent on income sources that can be cut off. Funding that keeps a small business operating, a water network functioning, a house habitable, a school open, or a lawyer able to halt an eviction increases the cost of a project of expulsion.



This leads to the dilemma of the Palestinian Authority. Jordan needs its continued existence because it provides an administrative, financial, and security framework that helps prevent a vacuum. At the same time, the Authority's representative legitimacy has eroded, and segments of Palestinian society feel unrepresented. Dealing with this reality requires two parallel tracks: protecting the minimum operational capacity of Palestinian institutions and building social and political relationships extending beyond the Authority–Hamis divide. Municipalities, universities, chambers of commerce, farmers' unions, businesspeople, local leaders, civil society, professional associations, and young actors can provide Jordan with knowledge and channels of support that do not depend on a dysfunctional political binary. Such a network would not be built to manufacture Palestinian leadership from Amman. It would be built because preventing displacement requires a society capable of remaining in place, and that capacity is distributed across society more widely than within formal leadership.

International law has a central role here. Under the relevant international legal frameworks, the West Bank is occupied territory. In 2024, the International Court of Justice provided a powerful legal basis regarding the illegality of settlements and annexation and the consequences of policies that compel people to leave. The Wadi Araba peace treaty establishes Jordanian rights and obligations concerning borders and water; the Hashemite custodianship gives Jordan a special position in Jerusalem; and the Oslo Accords do not convert occupation into Israeli sovereignty. Jordan's approach should move from "citing the law" to "building an implementation dossier around the law": identifying settlement-related entities, companies, and activities; supporting legal cases; documenting displacement; providing evidence to states imposing restrictions; and applying the distinction between Israel within its borders and the occupied territories in trade and investment.

This explains the particular importance of restrictions on settlement products, as distinct from comprehensive sanctions against Israel. A joint statement of September 8, 2026, brought together twelve countries—Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—and announced an intention to introduce national restrictions or support European restrictions on trade in settlement goods. These states deliberately drew a distinction: Israel is a legitimate economic counterpart, whereas settlements in occupied territory do not enjoy the same commercial protection. This approach is relevant to Jordan because it turns international law into an actionable instrument without immediately escalating to an all-out economic confrontation.

The immediate economic impact of these steps is relatively limited. The European Union is Israel's largest trading partner: bilateral goods trade amounted to €43.3 billion in 2025, alongside €26.6 billion in services trade in 2024. Settlement trade represents only a small share of those totals. A ban on settlement goods will not cripple the Israeli economy; its primary value is legal, political, and cumulative.

The timing of sanctions thus matters. Rapidly moving to broad sanctions against Israel would impose major economic, security, and diplomatic costs on Jordan and could make it difficult to secure Arab or Western backing. Yet a slow response without defined thresholds becomes



indefinite postponement. A more suitable path is gradual escalation tied to conduct: immediate, low-cost measures with strong legitimacy concerning settlements and violence; coordinated expansion if Israel takes further steps toward functional annexation; and a faster escalation if arrangements for cross-border displacement or attacks on essential water supplies emerge. In this approach, timing becomes part of the instrument. The speed of the response itself sends a message, and Jordan need not deploy the highest level of sanction to make the other side anticipate what could follow.

By invoking sanctions without explaining their costs, the King places a deliberate responsibility on the executive. A General Assembly address is not expected to list customs tariffs or company names; it sets a direction for institutions to explore. If the discussion ends with the observation that settlement trade is small, it will have answered a question the speech did not ask. The more important question is how a state with limited economic weight can amplify its influence by linking law, European markets, finance, and reputation. Here Jordan's value derives from information, legitimacy, and coalition-building, rather than the size of its domestic market alone.

That value emerges through four connected mechanisms. The first embeds the distinction between Israel and occupied territory in actual trading practices. The second forces companies, banks, and supply chains to consider legal and reputational risks. The third builds a coalition including states that have historically maintained close relations with Israel, reducing Tel Aviv's ability to depict the measure as the isolated act of a hostile country. The fourth creates an expandable ladder: from settlement goods to entities that finance or service settlements, and then to financial or investment restrictions tied to specific annexation measures. Israel's response to Britain—including steps to close the British consulate in East Jerusalem—illustrates that Israel itself interpreted an economically modest measure as a politically consequential message.

The question, then, is not whether existing sanctions are sufficient. It is whether Jordan can become a state that helps design a sanctions pathway, supplies the evidentiary dossiers, and builds the coalition around it, rather than waiting for decisions taken in other capitals.



Jordan in an Exposed Strategic Environment: Water, Syria, and Alliances

The King's address presented Syria as a "warning" that the world has chosen to ignore, referring to incursions, expansion, and the imposition of facts on the ground around water resources. Early in October, Israel resumed work on the so-called "Sufa 53 Line" in Quneitra, a move Amman condemned as a violation of Syrian sovereignty. Regional reports described the line as running parallel to the separation zone from Quneitra toward the Yarmouk basin near Jordan's border. Even allowing for caution over the reporting details, the underlying direction is clear: Israel is seeking to establish a physical security configuration in southern Syria, and Jordan regards its proximity to the Yarmouk basin and its borders as a change affecting its immediate security.

Jordan's concerns about Syria differ from those concerning the West Bank. In the West Bank, the danger is the erosion of Palestinian demographic continuity and sovereignty. In southern Syria, the concerns involve a vacuum or de facto partition, armed spheres of influence, a proxy Israeli–Turkish confrontation, special arrangements involving the Druze, expanded Israeli military deployment, and control over or proximity to water sources. An extremely weak Syria would leave Jordan dealing across its border with multiple actors instead of a state, each opening a different channel for regional influence. Syria may therefore represent the more rapidly developing threat, while the West Bank remains the more existential one. Ranking the two against each other obscures the different character of each threat.

Water connects the West Bank and Syria to the bilateral relationship with Israel. The peace treaty continues to regulate a fundamental share of Jordan's water allocation, while the supplementary 2021 agreement, which provided an additional 50 million cubic metres annually, expired in late 2025 and was not renewed. Israeli reports in July 2026 suggested that Israel had conditioned renewal on a moderation of Jordanian rhetoric and a restoration of higher-level relations. Neither government officially confirmed those conditions, so they should not be treated as an established official position. The reports nevertheless reveal an important perception within Israel: water as a means of political leverage. An August analysis by RUSI similarly situated the development within a shift in which water and energy, once tools for sustaining the "cold peace," are becoming instruments of strategic competition.

The question "Is Israel considering depriving Jordan of water?" requires a distinction between intention and capability. There is no public evidence establishing an official Israeli strategy to deprive Jordan of water. There is, however, an objective capacity to exert pressure arising from dependency, alongside indications and reports that the supplementary agreement has been used as a political bargaining instrument. Prudent policy addresses capability before intention is conclusively demonstrated. The National Water Carrier thus becomes as much a project of decision-making autonomy as a water-supply project. US financing announced in September—a loan of up to \$1 billion, political-risk insurance of up to \$800 million, and separate support—shows that Washington itself can help Jordan reduce a major source of vulnerability. Once the project produces 300 million cubic metres annually, the scope for using water as a political instrument will diminish even if water cooperation with Israel continues.



The next dilemma concerns Arab strategic depth. The fear that Jordan could find itself alone does not stem from an absence of Arab relations; it stems from a change in the function of alliances. Several Arab states have developed direct security and economic relations with Israel independently of a completed Palestinian political settlement. Gulf states are reassessing their American security umbrella after the war with Iran and Houthi attacks, while exploring more diversified arrangements. Saudi Arabia links normalization with Israel to progress toward Palestinian statehood, even as it develops its own regional security options. The United Arab Emirates maintains extensive economic ties with both Jordan and Israel. Egypt shares Jordan's opposition to displacement, but its security and economic priorities differ. In this environment, Amman cannot assume that a unified "Arab position" will automatically emerge in a crisis.

Jordan's position is therefore closer to a strategic middle ground than to a fixed bloc. Politically, Amman converges with Riyadh on the centrality of Palestinian statehood and opposition to annexation of the West Bank, and with Cairo on opposition to displacement and demographic reengineering. Economically, relations with the UAE are particularly significant: according to official Emirati figures, non-oil trade exceeded \$4.2 billion, while accumulated Emirati investment in Jordan was estimated at approximately \$23 billion in 2026. In security terms, the United States remains the principal umbrella. Legally and economically, Europe is becoming increasingly important because several European states are prepared to distinguish settlements from Israel and impose restrictions on them. Such diversity need not indicate indecision. It can become a strategy if Jordan manages each relationship according to its function and avoids subordinating itself to any single bloc.

The problem is that the emerging regional order has reduced the value of some of Jordan's traditional functions. Contacts between Israel and Arab states no longer depend on Amman to the same degree. The Abraham Accords and direct relations have diminished the value of Jordan's role as a "bridge." At the same time, its importance has increased as a node for defence, logistics, border management, and stability. If Amman continues asking others to value it primarily as the intermediary it once was, it will experience a sense of declining influence. If it redefines itself as a state that organizes coalitions around specific issues—preventing displacement, protecting southern Syria, water security, trade and corridors, and air defence—its emerging value can be converted into leverage.

This also explains the need for caution toward undisclosed regional alliances or arrangements into which Jordan may be drawn through security infrastructure without a clear national definition of their purpose. Europe emerges here as a strategic arena, rather than a substitute for the United States. Washington remains Jordan's principal source of security protection and financing, as well as the actor most capable of influencing Israel directly. Europe offers a different range of instruments: trade, rules of origin, law, sanctions, recognition, financing, and corporate compliance requirements. Differences between the American position and certain European positions can provide Jordan with a broader range of tools if managed without illusions. Europe alone cannot stop Israel, and the United States alone may not do what Jordan wants. A balanced approach draws on Washington for security deterrence and political pressure, and on Europe to translate law into economic and diplomatic costs.



The Home Front: The Most Critical Link in the National Security Equation

The domestic problem runs deeper than inadequate media communication. A gap in “strategic translation” appears to separate the head of state’s address from the daily work of institutions. An official who describes the speech as historic and forceful has yet to explain what it means for the state. A government that repeats the King’s words without defining thresholds and instruments leaves the political sphere suspended between populist exaggeration and bureaucratic reassurance. In this sense, the absence of officials able to convey the message to political actors and the wider public is more than a communications failure: it suggests that a new strategic doctrine has yet to take shape.

The bureaucratic mindset that developed around relations with Israel after 1994 had its own historical rationale. The treaty provided stable borders, security cooperation, water arrangements, a deeper relationship with the United States, and protection against some regional risks. It made sense for institutions to learn to separate crises from the architecture of the relationship, manage public unrest, maintain channels of communication, and assume that Israel’s security establishment understood Jordan’s strategic value. This mindset performed genuine functions. The difficulty is that its past success may delay recognition of the moment when the conditions for which it was designed have changed.

When the King describes displacement as an entrenched process, places Syria and water within the realm of national security, and invokes sanctions, an institutional response based on “we have no options and do not want a confrontation” turns caution into a doctrine of incapacity. Conversely, demands for immediate maximal responses, such as cancelling the treaty or severing all channels, turn the desire for action into a gamble. Changing the mindset begins by moving beyond this binary. Jordan can incrementally raise the costs of Israeli policies, reduce its dependencies, build coalitions, and support Palestinian steadfastness while preserving cooperation that serves its security and maintaining its US alliance. The strength of this approach lies in making escalation a structured option rather than an emotional outburst.

The home front implied by the speech cannot be reduced to the rhetorical formula of “unity behind the state.” For a country facing an existential threat, it consists of the legitimacy, trust, representation, and fairness that enable it to withstand costs. A society that believes parliament represents its interests, employment opportunities are distributed more equitably, the burdens of crises do not invariably fall on the same groups, and official information is truthful gives the state greater room for manoeuvre abroad. A society marked by youth alienation, a generation left waiting, unequal allocation of resources, and repeated circulation of the same elites is more vulnerable to rumours, polarization, and economic pressure.

Issues commonly regarded as domestic—the electoral law, quality of representation, renewal of political elites, social justice, the rentier economy, and employment opportunities—therefore become part of the national security equation. This does not entail turning reform into a security instrument; it recognizes that a state’s external strength rests on a domestic foundation. When the King calls for “internal resilience,” the question is what exactly is expected to endure: the state apparatus alone, or state and society together? If policy remains confined to managing protest and



the media, resilience will be fragile. Broader participation, trust, and fairness turn resilience into a strategic asset.

The communications gap becomes particularly apparent here. Displacement is an issue capable of generating panic when exaggerated and indifference when categorically dismissed. What is needed is public communication that explains indicators and thresholds without disclosing secrets. Citizens need to know that the state is monitoring specific changes in the West Bank, has scenarios concerning borders and water, is developing a legal route for discussing sanctions, and views its relationship with the United States as a means of protecting Jordan rather than an open-ended authorization to use its territory. Such knowledge will not eliminate political disagreement; it allows disagreement to concern identifiable options rather than an information vacuum filled by competing narratives.

In the language of securitization theory, the King made a clear move: he shifted water, borders, and displacement from the sphere of foreign policy into that of national security. Successful securitization requires a receptive audience and institutions that reallocate resources accordingly. Celebrating the speech without this transition produces “incomplete securitization”: an elevated tone without a corresponding change in practice. This may help explain the domestic perception that the King was ahead of the political apparatus in defining the threat.

There is also a message for Israel’s political and security elites. Jordanian–Israeli relations are not simply a relationship between two palaces; their domestic basis of acceptance is already limited. The longer settlement expansion, violence, water pressure, and expansion in Syria persist, the less able Jordanian decision-makers become to protect forms of cooperation they may still regard as beneficial to security. This is not a bargaining threat; it reflects the relationship between state and society. Israeli currents interested in preserving Jordan as a stable neighbour need to understand that current policies are consuming the political capital that has allowed Amman to manage the cold peace.

The message to Jordan’s own elites is more demanding: fear of the costs of confrontation is not, by itself, a policy. Every policy carries costs, including inaction. Delaying water independence has a cost. Allowing internal displacement to accumulate has a cost. Waiting for a better Israeli government has a cost. Entering a regional defence network without defining its national purpose has a cost. The strategic question is which costs can be controlled and which threaten the foundations of the state. When demography, borders, and water are at stake, the priority shifts from maximizing economic benefits to preventing existential costs.

This explains Jordan’s position “in the middle” among Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Washington, and Europe. Policy does not require ideological alignment. It requires the greatest possible number of effective relationships and the fewest commitments that constrain national decision-making. Saudi Arabia offers political depth on Palestinian statehood and a relationship of considerable significance in Washington and the Islamic world. The UAE offers economic and investment depth. Egypt is a natural partner in preventing displacement. Qatar has resources and Palestinian contacts that can help support society. Europe provides legal instruments and sanctions. The United States offers defence protection, financing, and influence. Even Iran requires a



communications channel to prevent misunderstandings of Jordan's role. This is a policy of preserving latent options in the positive sense: keeping choices open, postponing unnecessary alignment, and preparing tools that can be activated when needed.

If the preceding analysis suggests that Jordan's strategic environment has entered a different phase, the next question concerns how the state itself must change to operate effectively within it, rather than how deeply decision-makers should worry. The problem extends beyond the West Bank, relations with Israel, the Iranian threat, or southern Syria. Jordan now faces an intersection of changing geography, realigning alliances, dependencies that may become instruments of pressure, an international system in which law alone is increasingly unable to impose costs, and a domestic society directly affected by every external decision.

The absence of political and institutional mediation in translating the royal address into a clear national position: Domestic reactions to the King's speech revealed a gap between the strategic warnings it contained and the political response they elicited. Officials and political institutions did not play an effective role in interpreting its implications, clarifying its priorities, and conveying its messages to political forces and the wider public in ways that would build a shared understanding of the threats identified and the measures required. Consequently, much of the domestic response took on the character of short-lived mobilization and declarations of support rather than a structured political debate capable of grasping the warning's implications and assigning responsibilities. This gap points to a deeper problem: weak channels of mediation between political leadership and society and inadequate institutional capacity to translate strategic messages into intelligible political priorities, actionable positions, and public discussion commensurate with the challenges identified.

For this reason, Jordan's options cannot be treated as a disconnected list of measures. Restrictions on settlement products, accelerating the National Water Carrier, or deepening ties with Europe would remain limited steps unless placed within a coherent framework defining what Jordan seeks to protect, which threats could alter the foundations of its national security, when monitoring must give way to action, and how much cost the state can bear.

The next phase requires a policy organized around five interconnected tracks: rebuilding the state's decision-making processes; strengthening domestic resilience and reducing vulnerabilities; moving from rejecting displacement to preventing the conditions that produce it; reconstructing instruments for dealing with Israel between the treaty and confrontation; and creating an external environment that prevents Jordan from facing challenges beyond its capacity alone. These tracks must proceed in parallel rather than sequentially; weakness in one diminishes the effectiveness of the others.

First: Rebuilding the State's Strategic Thinking and Decision-Making

The problem begins with how the state defines threats. For decades, many issues could be managed in separate compartments: Palestine as a political issue; Syria as a matter of borders, security, and smuggling; water as a technical and negotiating file; relations with the United States as an alliance matter; Iran as a regional threat; and Israel as a relationship governed by the peace treaty and its



arrangements. This separation is increasingly ill-suited to the current environment. An Israeli step in the West Bank can become a domestic Jordanian crisis. Water pressure can alter public sentiment and narrow diplomatic room for manoeuvre. An Iranian attack can deepen Jordan's reliance on the American military umbrella, thereby increasing the value of certain Jordanian sites in adversaries' calculations. Developments in southern Syria can become a Jordanian issue when military or water-related changes reach the Yarmouk basin or the northern border.

- **Begin with a Unified National Threat Assessment**

Jordan needs a framework above the sectoral assessments produced by individual institutions from their respective mandates. A periodic document issued by the Policies Council or an equivalent national body should bring together the West Bank, displacement, southern Syria, water, Iran, allied military presence, and Arab relations in one assessment. Its value would lie in capturing interactions across these files, since contemporary threats often arise in the spaces between them.

Each cycle of the unified national assessment should answer one question: What has changed around Jordan, and how does that change affect its freedom of decision? If functional annexation expands in the West Bank, its implications for Palestinian stability, possible demographic pressure, Jordanian public opinion, and relations with Israel should appear on the same page. If Jordan faces an Iranian attack, the assessment should examine the implications for US forces' presence, domestic attitudes, and Amman's relations with the Gulf and Tehran. The assessment would thus move from aggregating information to explaining causal connections.

- **Establish Clear Jordanian Thresholds Before a Crisis**

Abundant information does not itself constitute a policy. The state must establish in advance the distinction between a worrying development and one requiring a change of course. A threshold is reached when continuing the existing policy becomes costlier than altering it.

In the West Bank, such thresholds might include implementation of the E1 project on a scale that materially disrupts geographic continuity; additional transfers of powers from military administration to Israeli civilian agencies, bringing functional annexation closer; the Palestinian Authority's inability to pay salaries or provide services; simultaneous evictions across several areas; fundamental changes to residency or crossing arrangements; or the emergence of an official programme facilitating Palestinian emigration.

In southern Syria, thresholds might include permanent military installations approaching the Yarmouk basin; changes in control of water resources linked to Jordanian security; establishment of a military sphere of influence adjoining the border; or the conversion of temporary security arrangements into a long-term presence.

Thresholds acquire practical value when predetermined responses are attached to them. A threshold recorded without an agreed response merely adds another piece of information. Linking each level of risk to a diplomatic, legal, economic, and security package makes thresholds part of deterrence.



- **Establish a Weekly Early-Warning System for Displacement**

Displacement begins long before people arrive at a border, when numerous small changes accumulate in land use, economic conditions, institutions, and freedom of movement. Jordan therefore needs an early-warning system combining data on settlement activity, demolitions, settler violence, water, employment opportunities, Palestinian Authority salaries, internal displacement, crossing movements, emigration applications, financial transfers, and changes in Israeli law.

This system requires a multidisciplinary team. Security expertise is essential but insufficient. It should include specialists in the Palestinian economy, international law, Israeli society, demography, water, and sociology, alongside Palestinian analysts familiar with local conditions. The objective is to identify a trajectory before it becomes an event.

An increase in demolitions alone may not indicate imminent displacement, nor would a decline in the Palestinian Authority's capacity necessarily produce population movement. But the convergence of falling incomes, growing violence, increasing evictions, tighter movement restrictions, more departures, and legal changes governing land could carry a very different significance. Early warning is intended to detect such cumulative patterns before they develop into a single crisis that is difficult to contain.

- **Prepare a Written National Scenario for Cross-Border Displacement**

Rejecting displacement is a political position; responding to the possibility of its occurrence requires a plan. Jordan must determine in advance how to sustain its rejection of the consolidation of forcible transfer, how to address emergency humanitarian conditions without allowing humanitarian assistance to become political acceptance of displacement, and what it would seek during the first hours from the United States, Arab states, the Security Council, and international institutions.

The plan needs to specify the position on border crossings, border management, communication with the Palestinian side, the legal basis for any temporary arrangements, international responsibility, and domestic public communication. The worst time to develop such a policy is when images emerge of thousands of civilians at the border and decisions become subject to intense humanitarian and media pressure.

- **Create a Permanent Unit to Study Israel as a Society and State, Not Merely a Government**

Jordan must move beyond reducing Israel to Netanyahu and the governing coalition. It needs deeper knowledge of changes within political parties, the military, security agencies, the judiciary, settler movements, education, demography, public opinion, and the political economy of settlements.

The objective is an institution that accumulates knowledge over years, rather than requiring each Jordanian government or agency to start from scratch during every crisis. This unit should distinguish structural trends that are difficult to reverse from coalition policies specific to a given government. It should also examine how perceptions of Jordan have changed within Israel, where



currents that regard Jordanian stability as a strategic interest remain influential, and where expansionist approaches to regional geography are gaining ground.

Jordan would thereby build policy around underlying trajectories rather than individual names.

- **Create a Strategic Dashboard Linked Directly to the Centre of Decision-Making**

All of the above ultimately needs to be translated into a concise, usable format for the King and decision-makers. A dashboard should contain a limited set of indicators: internal displacement in the West Bank; trends in annexation and settlement; the Palestinian Authority's operational capacity; developments in southern Syria; external water dependence; exposure to Iranian attacks; air-defence readiness; the strength of an Arab coalition; European action; and trends in domestic public opinion.

Each indicator should have three components: a trajectory, a threshold, and an action. Once this relationship is institutionalized, the speech's general warning becomes a decision system. It becomes clear when information must lead to an assessment, when assessment must produce action, and who is responsible for implementation.

Second: Strengthening the Home Front, Sovereignty, and Resilience Against External Pressure

A state's strength in foreign policy is measured not by the force of its rhetoric but by the costs it can withstand when using its instruments. If water, economic, financial, or military pressure can compel Jordan to retreat, a political position on its own has limited value.

The objective is to reduce the instruments that any outside actor can employ to constrain Jordanian decision-making. Strategic autonomy does not mean abandoning alliances, trade, or interdependence—an unrealistic prospect for a country of Jordan's size. It means preventing dependence from becoming a means of dictating decisions.

- **Conduct a Comprehensive Audit of Dependencies on Israel**

The state needs a complete map of water, gas, electricity, trade, transport, communications, services, and security cooperation. For each sector, it should assess the scale of dependence, the time needed to secure alternatives, the cost of interruption, and the actor capable of exploiting that dependence during a crisis.

The aim is not to sever existing relationships. Some interdependence benefits Jordan and may reinforce stability. A problem arises when a specific component becomes so critical that another party can impose costs the state cannot absorb.

Dependence should therefore be classified in three categories: low-risk dependencies that are readily replaceable; medium-risk dependencies requiring contingency alternatives; and strategic dependencies that cannot be replaced quickly and require protection and diversified supply.

- **Treat the National Water Carrier as a Sovereignty Project**

Water must be understood as more than a conventional infrastructure file. In the present environment, access to alternative supplies is a means of protecting political independence.



Accelerating the National Water Carrier, securing its financing and energy supply, expanding storage, and planning the transition until full operation should become national security priorities. The appropriate measure of success is not kilometres of infrastructure completed but the reduction in Jordan's sensitivity to external decisions affecting water.

American support for the project has additional strategic value. The Washington alliance, which may increase military exposure in certain areas, can be used in the water sector to reduce vulnerability to pressure from Israel. Managing this paradox is an important element of strategic statecraft.

The alliance becomes more sustainable when Jordan knows precisely what it receives and what costs it bears, and when operating rules and missions are clearly understood at the political and military levels.

- **Define the Conditions for Jordanian Participation in Any Regional Defence Architecture**

The primary objective of any defence cooperation must remain the protection of Jordanian territory and its population. Cooperation on early warning, air defence, or intelligence sharing may be necessary, but its purpose must be clearly defined so that technical cooperation does not automatically become a political commitment to wars Jordan has not chosen.

Clarity serves three purposes simultaneously: it reassures the domestic public that the function is defensive, establishes the limits of participation for allies, and reduces adversaries' ability to portray Jordan as an unrestricted offensive base.

- **Establish an Internal Strategic Communication Mechanism Led by Officials with Information and Decision-Making Authority**

One weakness in previous phases has been the gap between the head of state's discourse and the messages reaching political elites and the public. At every major development, the state should explain what happened, why it matters to Jordan, what has changed in the assessment, what the state will do, and what remains unchanged.

This task extends beyond the role of a media spokesperson. National security issues sometimes require the foreign minister, prime minister, or a senior security or economic official who can explain the context and the decision.

Over time, this process can foster a politically informed public capable of understanding gradual escalation. It would also prevent every royal statement from becoming an occasion for brief mobilization, followed by a vacuum filled with rumours or unrealistic expectations.

- **Turn the Concept of the Home Front into a Measurable State Programme**

The home front is more than a slogan about national unity at a moment of crisis. It comprises the conditions that determine a state's ability to withstand prolonged emergencies.

Genuine parliamentary representation, renewal of elites, youth participation, employment opportunities, fair distribution of resources, protection of the middle class, access to reliable information, and confidence in institutions all form part of the national security equation.



A state asking its population to bear prolonged economic, political, and security costs must ensure that people feel they share in decision-making and in the distribution of burdens. A society experiencing marginalization, blocked representation, or injustice becomes more susceptible to polarization and rumours and more sensitive to the costs imposed.

Political and social reform thus becomes part of the state's strategic capacity, rather than a separate policy file.

- **Prepare Financial Protection Against External Political Crises**

A shift toward a more assertive Jordanian policy may provoke economic reactions. Tourism, investment, energy, insurance, and shipping may be affected, whether by a crisis with Israel or a wider regional war.

Jordan therefore needs contingency financing lines and advance arrangements with Arab and international partners so that fear of an economic shock in the first months does not become a permanent veto on political decisions.

Strategic autonomy requires financial reserves as well as a political position. The ability to absorb six months of pressure may sometimes matter more than the scale of an instrument deployed on the first day.

Third: From Rejecting Displacement to Preventing Its Production

Displacement is the point where the Palestinian issue intersects directly with Jordanian security. If Jordan treats it as a future event to be awaited, it will enter the contest too late. Displacement takes shape through a succession of measures that make land less habitable and increase the cost of remaining. Jordanian policy must therefore shift from rejecting the final outcome to intervening in the conditions that produce it.

- **Preserve the Palestinian Authority's Essential Functions While Linking Support to Reform**

The Palestinian Authority may face serious criticism concerning its performance and representation, yet the collapse of its core functions would directly affect Jordan. Salaries, services, municipalities, and civilian and security institutions sustain part of Palestinian social life. An institutional vacuum raises the risks of disorder and displacement and expands Israel's ability to administer land and population directly. Jordan could lead a Saudi, European, and international initiative to preserve essential functions in exchange for a reform programme addressing governance, representation, and transparency. Such support is not a political reward; it protects the institutional barrier against collapse.

- **Broaden Palestinian Contacts Beyond the Official Political Binary**

Jordan needs a deeper relationship with Palestinian society itself. Municipalities, the private sector, professional associations, universities, independent figures, social forces, and young people are all sources of knowledge and potential partners in sustaining communities.



This relationship must respect the independence of Palestinian decision-making and must not become an attempt to construct an alternative leadership. Its purpose is to give Jordanian decision-makers a more accurate picture of areas under pressure, guide support, and detect early changes in public opinion, economic conditions, and migration. Reducing Palestinian society to the Palestinian Authority and Hamas excludes much of social reality from view.

These measures complement the early-warning system and displacement scenario discussed earlier. Jordan would then have a sequence beginning with early monitoring, followed by support for continued residence, preservation of institutions, and preparation for the most serious threshold should pressures generate cross-border movement.

Fourth: Between the Treaty and Confrontation—Rebuilding the Instruments for Dealing with Israel

One of the principal constraints on the Jordanian debate is the tendency to frame relations with Israel as a choice between two extremes: preserving the existing formula or moving to a rupture. There is a substantial range of options between them, encompassing law, economics, diplomacy, the treaty, sanctions, rights and obligations, and international networks. Jordan needs a graduated set of instruments that allows it to increase costs in proportion to the level of threat.

- Turn International Law into an Operational File

International law must move from foreign ministry statements into systematic day-to-day work. A joint team including the foreign and justice ministries and independent experts should determine the implications of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion, the legal distinction between Israel and occupied territories, responsibility for forcible transfer, the status of natural resources, and how these questions intersect with the Wadi Araba Treaty and the Hashemite custodianship.

Each development on the ground should be linked to a legal provision, the relevant international body, the required evidence, and the possible measure. Law would then become a means of accumulating pressure rather than merely moral language added to a political statement.

- Establish a Legal and Economic Distinction Between Israel and Its Settlements

If Jordan regards settlements as unlawful, that position should be reflected in certain economic rules. Rules of origin, public procurement, imports, investment, financial services, and companies directly involved in settlement construction or violence require careful review.

This approach allows Jordan to raise the costs of settlement expansion and annexation while retaining a relatively separate space for its relationship with Israel. It offers a stronger legal starting point than immediately resorting to broad and insufficiently assessed measures.

- Design a Graduated Sanctions Framework Linked to Defined Thresholds

Sanctions lose their value when they are emotional reactions disconnected from an objective. A sequence of predetermined levels is required:



The first level targets individuals and entities associated with documented violence or unlawful settlement activity.

The second covers services or entities enabling specific expansion or contributing to a project with strategic consequences.

The third introduces coordinated diplomatic and economic measures in response to significant functional annexation or structural changes on the ground.

The fourth is triggered by large-scale displacement or direct interference with water resources or borders.

The existence of this framework has a deterrent effect because it makes costs foreseeable. The other party knows that particular actions will produce a corresponding escalation in the response.

Fifth: From Strategic Exposure to Building External Depth

The most difficult question Jordan faces in the next phase is whether developments affecting its national security could emerge without a regional base willing to share the costs. The Arab environment has changed; alliances are not necessarily built around the Palestinian issue, and direct relations between Israel and several states have diminished some of Jordan's traditional functions. The answer is not to search for a single alternative bloc. It is preferable to construct issue-specific networks so that Jordanian security does not depend on one alliance or capital.

- **Establish a Permanent Track for Southern Syria and the Yarmouk Basin**

Southern Syria should move from the general Syrian file to a clearly defined geographic theatre with Jordan-specific indicators. Monitoring should include satellite imagery, military movements, changes to roads and fortifications, control of water sources, developments in Suwayda, Daraa, and Quneitra, and Israeli–Turkish interaction.

Jordan can build on its position as a host of contacts and talks related to Syria. Mediation becomes more valuable when Amman has a clear view of the developments it seeks to prevent: a permanent military presence at its borders, changes affecting the water basin, or the transformation of the south into a contested sphere of influence threatening stability for years.

- **Create a Contact Group with States Taking or Considering Measures Against Settlement Activity**

Jordan need not develop this approach from the beginning. Several states have begun taking measures concerning trade and sanctions against individuals and entities linked to settlements. Jordan's advantage lies in its proximity to the issue and its field, legal, and political knowledge. It could supply these countries with maps, information on relevant entities, and evidence, helping convert isolated actions into a broader pattern.

The coalition matters more than the size of Jordan's own sanctions. Israel may absorb a small measure taken by Amman alone; its impact changes when it forms part of an accumulating international trend.



- **Rebuild the European Track as an Independent Instrument of Jordanian Policy**

Europe should be understood neither as a single bloc nor as an automatic extension of the American position. Engagement must encompass Brussels, influential capitals, parliaments, trade ministries, banks, and legal institutions. Some countries are prepared to go further on settlements, while others remain more cautious.

Jordan's role is to shift Europe's minimum common position from opposition to settlement activity toward willingness to impose costs on specific actions. Europe's strategic value derives from its commercial, economic, and legal weight in relations with Israel. When political positions are converted into economic rules, their impact changes.

- **Turn Dialogue with Washington from General Requests into Operational Guarantees**

Jordan should identify three thresholds in its discussions with the United States: cross-border displacement, annexation measures that further undermine the viability of a Palestinian state, and arrangements in southern Syria affecting Jordanian water or borders. The message must extend beyond calling these developments "concerning." They should be linked to Jordan's stability and to American interests in the Kingdom and the region. The argument in Washington should combine political, moral, and security dimensions: Israeli policies that threaten Jordanian stability also affect the sustainability of an entire American security architecture dependent on Jordan.

- **Build a Small, Operational Arab Core Rather than Awaiting Consensus**

Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt constitute a natural core on displacement and Palestinian statehood, each for immediate reasons. Jordan is concerned with borders and demography; Egypt has experience and concerns involving Gaza and Sinai; and Saudi Arabia possesses political and Islamic weight and a relationship with Washington, while linking normalization to conditions related to Palestinian statehood.

What is required is advance agreement on financing, messaging to Washington, action at the United Nations, support for Palestinian institutions, and responses to the crossing of defined thresholds.

- **Develop the Protection of Christianity in Palestine and Jerusalem into a Distinct Diplomatic Track**

Jordan has a significant advantage through its custodianship of Islamic and Christian holy sites and its relationships with churches. Engagement with Western churches, moderate evangelical leaders, universities, and Christian institutions in the United States and Europe could develop a different narrative of the conflict, focused on protecting the Palestinian Christian presence and rejecting attempts to turn the conflict into a religious confrontation.

This arena is particularly important in the United States, where certain religious interpretations shape political attitudes toward Israel. Jordan can engage this audience with a language and degree of legitimacy that other actors may find difficult to replicate.



Conclusion: Where Does Jordan Actually Stand?

These measures are not five separate policies. They form layers of a single doctrine intended to widen Jordan's freedom of decision in an environment where that freedom is gradually narrowing:

The first track rebuilds the state's strategic thinking so that it can recognize threats before they fully materialize.

The second reduces the instruments others can use to pressure Jordan.

The third regards Palestinians' continued presence on their land as an element of Jordanian security.

The fourth establishes a graduated range between silence and confrontation, making law, the treaty, and sanctions usable instruments.

The fifth prevents Jordan from confronting a regional and international environment beyond its capabilities on its own.

The relationship among these tracks determines success. Raising the costs for Israel is of little use if the Jordanian economy cannot absorb the response; symbolic Jordanian sanctions have little value if disconnected from Europe and other states. An American security alliance is insufficient if greater dependence increases exposure without corresponding protection. Nor is the home front adequate as a slogan while representation, trust, and economic justice remain outside national security calculations.

Real change therefore begins when the state stops treating each issue in isolation and starts managing the network of dependencies, threats, and capabilities as one system. The first priority for Jordan in the next phase is the ability to understand developments before they cross critical thresholds, to possess alternatives that allow it to act when those thresholds are reached, and to secure partners who will share the resulting costs.

Jordan does not face a binary choice between peace and war. That is the old framework, one that narrows the range of options to the point of paralysis. The Kingdom faces a different question: how should it manage a peace relationship with a state whose leadership regards some of its policies as direct threats to the foundations of Jordanian national security? This question permits graduated measures, instruments, and approaches. It prevents the treaty from becoming a mental constraint on policy imagination and prevents anger from turning it into a card discarded at the first test.

Displacement lies at the centre of the threat because it brings together geography, demography, the Palestinian issue, and Jordan's domestic sphere. The term "imminent" must be defined precisely: forcible displacement is already occurring in parts of the West Bank; conditions pushing people to leave are expanding; and projects such as E1 and policies of functional annexation heighten the prospect of more dangerous stages. Open sources have not yet established large-scale cross-border displacement into Jordan as an operational process. The difference between these



statements is not an attempt to soften the danger; it is the foundation of sound early warning. Jordan must act while the conditions are forming, rather than waiting for the outcome.

The Israel Jordan faces has changed enough to make waiting for “the day after Netanyahu” an inadequate policy. Israeli public opinion has shifted further to the right on West Bank issues, ideas of annexation and displacement have entered the broader political arena, and civilian and administrative institutions increasingly participate in changing the status of the territory. At the same time, Israeli security and political forces continue to regard peace with Jordan as a strategic asset and oppose certain expansionist measures. An effective Jordanian approach must account for this complexity: assume dangerous trends may persist, make use of internal differences within Israel, and condition any improvement in relations on measurable changes on the ground.

The speech itself makes clear that the King has retained peace as an objective; on the same day, he explicitly reaffirmed the two-state solution. What changed is peace’s place in the architecture of policy. In 2025, the two-state solution occupied the centre of the proposed operational outcome. In 2026, the primary questions concern how to prevent annexation and displacement and defend water and borders; peace then remains an objective requiring land, institutions, and a population able to remain in place. The reference to sanctions in this context is more than a rhetorical detail: it signals that instruments for raising costs have entered the policy vocabulary.

Sanctions alone will not change Israel. A ban on settlement goods has limited direct economic impact relative to the volume of Israel’s trade with Europe. Its significance lies in establishing the practical legitimacy of differentiation, bringing companies and finance into calculations of cost, and building a coalition that can expand. If Jordan treats the measure as a decisive economic blow, it will fail. If it treats it as the first step in a graduated legal, diplomatic, and economic pressure strategy, it may become part of a wider approach.

Water makes the meaning of strategic autonomy especially clear. Maintaining the treaty and cooperation does not preclude developing alternatives. Every cubic metre produced by the National Water Carrier reduces the ability of an external actor to turn a Jordanian need into a political condition. The same applies to security: every additional national air-defence capability reduces dependence, and every clearly defined arrangement governing allied facilities limits misunderstandings of Jordan’s role. Autonomy does not mean isolation; it means the capacity to cooperate from a position that retains alternatives.

The Arab challenge is more complex. Jordan cannot base its strategy on waiting for a unified Arab front, but it also cannot afford to act alone. The answer is diversified functional depth: Saudi Arabia on Palestinian policy, Egypt on rejecting displacement, the UAE on economics, Qatar on financing and contacts, the United States on security and pressure, and Europe on law and trade. This turns “non-alignment” into an active policy rather than passive neutrality. The Kingdom preserves the widest possible set of relationships because the threat itself has multiple sources.

The domestic sphere is the decisive link in determining whether this approach can work. A state cannot ask a society that feels alienated, underrepresented, and unfairly burdened to demonstrate strategic resilience while expecting a wide margin for national decision-making. The home front



begins with trust, representation, fairness, renewal of elites, and reliable information. Political reform is directly linked here to national security without being reduced to security discourse: a society that regards itself as a partner gives the state greater capacity to negotiate and resist pressure than a society expected merely to follow instructions.

Ultimately, the speech of 22 September should be read as a test of the Jordanian state more than as a message to Israel or the international community. The King identified the threat, moved some of its dimensions into the national security sphere, and named instruments available to the international community. If institutions continue operating under the same rules, the speech will have outpaced the state. If early-warning systems change, dependencies are reduced, sanctions coalitions are built, Palestinian steadfastness becomes an investment in the territorial and social conditions of continued residence, alliance functions are redefined, and officials emerge who can explain this doctrine to society, the result will be a genuine change in approach.

Success will not be measured by Jordan becoming stronger than Israel or compelling Israel to change all its policies single-handedly. The more realistic and important measure is whether any actor—Israel, Iran, or even an ally—has less ability to narrow Jordan’s freedom of decision. When the Kingdom can say “no” without fear over water, defend its airspace without automatically becoming a party to war, prevent displacement before it reaches its borders, increase the costs of annexation through an international coalition, and rely on a society that understands the threats and feels represented, it will have converted its geographic position from a source of exposure into a source of strength.

This is the most rigorous reading of the phrase “the future is shaped by what we choose to pay attention to.” Attention here means more than moral awareness: it entails allocating resources, changing doctrine, defining thresholds, and building alternatives before developments close off the options. The danger identified in the speech is present in the West Bank, approaching through Syria, apparent in water relations, and revealed from another direction by Iranian missiles. The danger wholly within Jordan’s control is knowing all this while continuing to act as though its environment has not changed.



References

Official Jordanian Sources

The Royal Hashemite Court, Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II to the 81st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 22 September 2026.

The Royal Hashemite Court, Meeting of the King with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 22 September 2026.

The Royal Hashemite Court, Multilateral Meeting Convened by US President Donald Trump, 22 September 2026.

The Royal Hashemite Court, Address by the King to the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 23 September 2025.

The Royal Hashemite Court, Address by the King to the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 24 September 2024.

Jordan Armed Forces–Arab Army, Statement on the Missile Attack on the Kingdom, 9 September 2026.

Jordan News Agency (Petra), Condemnation of the Resumption of Work on “Sufa Line 53” in Southern Syria, 4 October 2026.

International Law and the United Nations

International Court of Justice, Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Advisory Opinion, 19 July 2024.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Israel’s Settlement Expansion Drives Mass Displacement in the West Bank, 17 March 2026.

OHCHR, Israel Must Halt Forcible Displacement of Khan Al Ahmar and Settlement Expansion in E1, 22 May 2026.

Israeli Sources and Studies on Israel

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), A Conceptual Shift in the West Bank: Absolute Security, Decisive Outcome, and the Application of Sovereignty, 23 April 2026.

INSS, The Roaring Lion: A New Strategic Window for Israel–Jordan Relations, 18 March 2026.

INSS, Different Shades of Right: Egyptian and Jordanian Perspectives on Israel’s Elections, 28 July 2026.

Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), Israeli Society Index, August 2026.

The Times of Israel, reporting on Gadi Eisenkot, E1 and the two-state solution, 27 August 2026.



Sanctions and Trade

Global Affairs Canada / Foreign Ministries of Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Joint Statement on the Two-State Solution and Settlement Trade Restrictions, 8 September 2026.

European Commission, EU Trade Relations with Israel, 2025 trade data.

Reuters, reporting on UK settlement-goods sanctions and Israel's response against the British consulate in East Jerusalem, September–October 2026.

Water and Regional Security

Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), The Resource Politics of Cold Peace: Israel's Relations with Jordan, Egypt, 6 August 2026.

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, financing for Jordan's National Water Carrier, 2026.

Jordan Times, DFC loan and political-risk insurance for the National Water Carrier, 23 September 2026.

Reuters, Syria–Israel US-mediated talks in Jordan, 23 August 2026.

The National, reporting on the “Sufa 53 Line” and its extension toward the Yarmouk basin, 5 October 2026.

Reuters, reporting on Iranian attacks on US forces and allied states in Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain, July 2026.

Foreign Policy, Sean Yom, “Jordan Sees Bigger Threat From Israel Than Iran,” 31 August 2026.

Political Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language, 1995; and the three-dimensional model of text, discursive practice and social practice.

Teun A. van Dijk, “Discourse Semantics and Ideology,” Discourse & Society, 1995; “Discourse, Context and Cognition,” Discourse Studies, 2006.

Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach,” 2015.

Piotr Cap, “Axiological Aspects of Proximization,” Journal of Pragmatics, 2010; Proximization: The Pragmatics of Symbolic Distance Crossing, 2013.

Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, Security: A New Framework for Analysis, 1998.

Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” Journal of Communication, 1993.