

JORDAN FACES RISKS FROM ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

Bottom Line Up Front:

- The Israel-Hamas war presents Jordan's leadership with more risks to stability than virtually any other Arab government.
- Jordan's population is majority Palestinian, many of whom resent King Abdullah's close alignment with the United States, which has refused to back a ceasefire in Gaza.
- The government is trying to reflect popular sentiment while at the same time preserving the peace treaty with Israel and close relationships with the United States.
- Amman's security forces are among the best trained and most effective in the region, likely helping the King's government ride out the crisis.

The policies of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, [as well as its stability](#), are pivotal to calming regional tensions after Israel's operations in Gaza end. The Israel-Hamas war is particularly challenging for the Kingdom because the majority of the population is of Palestinian origin. Jordan's leaders - among them Queen Rania, who is from a Jordanian family of Palestinian origin - have called for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and steadfastly refuse to participate in any post-Gaza security arrangements in Gaza unless doing so is part of a comprehensive "two-state solution" that creates a Palestinian state. In late October, Jordanian diplomats were instrumental in passing a U.N. General Assembly resolution calling for a ceasefire. Yet, the Kingdom has survived [numerous challenges](#), remaining in power despite several high-profile conflicts including the Gulf War of 1991, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its violent aftermath, the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, the civil conflict in neighboring Syria, the Islamic State (ISIS) challenge to Iraq and Syria, and numerous rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Lebanese Hezbollah.

Jordan's participation in post-war arrangements will be crucial because its modern history has been intertwined with the West Bank. Amman controlled the territory, including Jerusalem, from the 1948 war that accompanied the establishment of the State of Israel until Israel captured it in the Six-Day War of 1967. At the same time, Jordan's relations with the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#) - which dominates the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA) - have long been fraught with distrust. In 1970, at a time when the PLO was still committed to armed struggle against Israel, Jordanian forces expelled PLO gunmen from the Kingdom after they attempted to maintain control of territory there. In the subsequent decade, Jordanian officials were instrumental in coaxing then-PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat to abandon armed struggle in favor of talks with Israel, a policy shift that led to the U.S.-brokered Israel-PLO Oslo Accords of 1993. The Accords established the PA as the governing body for the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip, although both territories remained under tight Israeli security control. The Oslo Accords set out a roadmap for the formation of a separate Palestinian state but talks on a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement have been moribund for nearly two decades. Still, the Oslo Accords gave Jordan's leadership the political cover it needed to sign a peace agreement with Israel in 1994 - the first such treaty between Israel and an Arab state since the 1979 Israel-Egypt pact. In 1996, two years later, U.S. officials designated Jordan a "Major Non-NATO Ally," opening Jordan to substantial additional security cooperation with the United States. Since then, in recognition of the centrality of Jordan to Western interests, U.S. leaders have steadily increased aid to Jordan, which largely lacks the resource base of many other Arab states and which has had to cope with a major influx of refugees from the wars in Iraq and civil conflict in Syria. A 2022 U.S.-Jordan Memorandum of Understanding outlines nearly \$1.5 billion in U.S. aid per year for seven years.

Despite Jordan's success in navigating the crosscurrents of the region, the Kingdom has always been vulnerable to potential unrest stemming from Palestinians frustrated at the lack of fulfillment of their aspiration for an independent state. Although the government has always distanced itself from Hamas, Jordan's population has been outraged by the civilian deaths in Gaza and abuses against Palestinians on the [West Bank as well](#). Israel's stated intention to respond to the October 7 Hamas incursion by removing Hamas from power produced a nearly immediate backlash in Jordanian cities and a government reaction. On October 13, Jordanian police fired tear gas to disperse protesters who were trying to approach the Israel-Jordan border in a show of solidarity with Palestinians. On October 20, in response to the reports that Israel had bombed the Al Ahli Arab Hospital three days earlier, more than 6,000 people took part in a protest in downtown Amman arranged by opposition parties and tribal groups. (U.S. intelligence later corroborated Israeli assertions that the strike was caused by an errant missile launch by Gaza militants, though a range of sources still debate this assessment.) Protests, sit-ins, and rallies in the Jordan Valley, on the border with the West Bank, or in front of the Israeli and US embassies have occurred on almost a daily basis since the beginning of the war.

In addition to utilizing its well-trained security forces to keep demonstrations contained, the government has taken steps to demonstrate to the population that it sympathizes with the population in Gaza. As a response to the Al Ahli hospital bombing, despite debate over its cause, Amman [canceled a meeting](#) between the King, PA President Mahmoud Abbas, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, and President Biden, who visited only Israel during his mid-October trip. The planned summit reportedly was intended to discuss possible [governing and security arrangements](#) for Gaza after Israel's offensive concludes. On November 1, the Kingdom recalled its ambassador to Israel, explained by Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi as: "an expression of Jordan's position of rejection and condemnation of the raging Israeli war on Gaza, which is killing innocent people and causing an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe." On November 16, Safadi announced that Jordan would exit a United Arab Emirates (UAE)-brokered deal intended to have Jordan supply solar energy to Israel in return for Israel giving it desalinated water. On November 16, suggesting possible differences within the regime, Prime Minister Bisher Khasawneh said that any Israeli effort to physically attempt to relocate Palestinians from the West Bank, in any form, would be considered an act of war. His comment appeared to diverge from King Abdullah's strategy not to jeopardize any key pillars of Jordanian policy, including the peace treaty with Israel and close relations with the United States, while at the same time reflecting the popular mood against Israel's operations and tactics in Gaza. King Abdullah has sought to lay out the country's position for the longer-term future of the region; in a November 14 op-ed in the Washington Post, he wrote: "An Israeli leadership that is unwilling to take the path of peace on the basis of the two-state solution will not be able to provide its people the security they need." His statement aligns Jordan closely with that of U.S. officials, who also argue that the only means to end the cycle of violence is a two-state solution.

In addition to calibrating government policy, Jordan's leaders do not hesitate to use force to keep demonstrations from spiraling out of control or posing a threat to the King's [grip on power](#). Even though many Jordanians resent the King's close alignment with the United States, which is backing Israel with few conditions, he carries substantial legitimacy for preserving stability during his more than two decades in power. He is respected for maintaining Jordan's key regional alliances, including with the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf, even as some of the Gulf states have appeared to de-emphasize the Palestinian cause in favor of security cooperation with Israel. Their sentiments in support of the Palestinians in Gaza notwithstanding, most Jordanians, by all accounts, do not want to experience the level of civil conflict that caused neighboring Syria or nearby Yemen to collapse into failed states. To keep order, Jordan's forces are among the best-trained in the region, benefitting substantially from cooperating with the U.S. and other NATO forces against Al Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), and other missions. Jordanian forces train with U.S. military personnel, an unspecified number of which are stationed in Jordan, manning sophisticated air and missile defenses and combat aircraft. The King's legitimacy and overall level of support, coupled with the professionalism of his security forces, will likely ensure that his regime will be able to weather the turmoil produced by the Israel-Hamas crisis.

