

Israel's war of annihilation against Palestinians puts King Abdullah's regime in Jordan on a knife edge

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's goal of erasing Hamas, with the full backing of US imperialism and its European allies, is the prelude to a far broader, regional war against Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that puts Jordan firmly in the line of fire. It is destabilising King Abdullah's autocratic rule that has little or no popular legitimacy.

Jordan was carved out of the former Syrian province of the Ottoman empire by British imperialism in the aftermath of World War I as a frontline state to defend Britain's strategic interests in the oil-rich region. It would be ruled by the Hashemite family from the Hejaz in what is now Saudi Arabia. Always unviable, the Hashemite monarchy was from the very beginning dependent on aid from first Britain and since 1957 from the United States. Washington currently provides about \$1.5 billion a year in economic and military aid, an amount equal to almost half the state budget.

Abdullah, who inherited the throne from his father 25 years ago, rules as an absolute monarch. He has maintained his corrupt and venal rule—amassing untold riches at the expense of the Jordanian people—by pitting the local Arab population, or “East Bankers”, against Palestinian refugees. Driven out or fleeing Israel's wars of 1948 and 1967, Palestinians make up just over half of the country's nearly 11 million population. While a few have become exceedingly rich, the vast majority are brutally exploited and largely deprived of political rights. Palestinians who left the occupied territories after 1988 when Jordan relinquished claim to the West Bank do not qualify for Jordanian citizenship.

Parliamentary elections earlier this month were fraudulent, with just 32 percent of the 5.1 million eligible voters turning up to cast their vote. Playing no role in determining the government, the parliament serves only as a talking shop and cover for Abdullah, who appoints and dismisses prime ministers at will to deflect criticism away from his corrupt rule that depends on censorship, surveillance and a system of military patronage drawn largely from the East Bankers. To criticise him in casual conversation is to court arrest amid a powerful security apparatus that works closely with Israeli and western intelligence services and the United Arab Emirates.

Nevertheless, the elections were held under new rules whereby 41 out of the 138-seat parliament, which has long been dominated by tribal and pro-government factions, could be contested by

political parties. And they saw support for Palestinian Hamas surge, with the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood to which Hamas is affiliated, winning 31 seats. Though led by upper-class Jordanians from East Bank families, the championing of Palestinian issues means that much of the IAF's rank-and-file consists of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in refugee camps.

While it is the largest vote for the bourgeois clerical group since 1989, when the Muslim Brotherhood gained 22 out of 80 seats in parliament, the parliament remains largely in the hands of tribal and pro-government members.

The vote highlights the importance of the Palestinian issue in Jordanian political life. Israel's war on Gaza and now daily attacks on the West Bank have aroused popular anger, while Washington's full-throated support for Israel has fuelled anti-American sentiment. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has carried out scores of drone strikes, helicopter gunship attacks and airstrikes targeting heavily populated towns and cities, as well as refugee camps in Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nablus, that have, according to the UN, killed more than 650 Palestinians, including 115 children and injured at least 5,500—as well as arresting over 10,300 since the start of the Gaza war.

On August 27, the IDF sent hundreds of ground soldiers, drones, warplanes, and bulldozers into the cities of Tulkarm and Jenin, as well as the Al Fara refugee camp near Tubas, in the largest military operation in the West Bank since 2002. Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz described it as an operation designed “to thwart Islamic-Iranian terror infrastructure that was set up there.” Officials in Jenin reported that even before the latest attack the IDF had bulldozed over 70 percent of Jenin's streets, destroyed 20 kilometres miles of water and sewage infrastructure, and cut off water to 80 percent of the city.

The IDF attacks have been accompanied by daily assaults by fascistic settlers on the Palestinians, their homes and farms. Last month, settler violence in the northeast of the West Bank caused the largest wave of forcible transfers of Palestinian communities since the start of the war on Gaza as they drove out 119 Palestinians in three communities, erected new settler outposts and blocked access to water.

Fears are rife that Israel intends to carry out a “Nakba 2.0,” driving the nearly three million Palestinians out of the West Bank

and transforming Jordan into a Palestinian state as members of Netanyahu's far-right cabinet openly call for pushing the Palestinians into the country, a move that Jordanian Foreign Minister Safadi said would be treated as a "declaration of war."

Last July, just before Netanyahu's address to Congress in Washington, the Knesset passed a resolution outlawing a future Palestinian state. It declared: "The Israeli Knesset opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state on any piece of land west of the Jordan River. The existence of a Palestinian state in the heart of Israel will pose an existential threat to the State of Israel and its citizens, will further extend the Israel-Palestinian Arab conflict and be a source of destabilisation for the entire region."

For Jordanians, the words "any piece of land west of the Jordan River" mean that the only place Israel will tolerate a Palestinian state will be in Jordan. It prompted Abdullah to warn that the region will "not accept having [its] future held hostage to the policies of the extremist Israeli government" and that Israel's attacks on the occupied West Bank constitute a direct threat to Jordan's security that could spark a wider regional conflict. The Jordanian parliament unanimously endorsed a motion to review its 1994 treaty with Israel that expressly forbids any such expulsion, stating, "within their control, involuntary movements of persons in such a way as to adversely prejudice the security of either Party should not be permitted."

In another provocative move, Katz repeated his call—echoed by other ministers as well as the prime minister—to build a wall along the border with Jordan, Israel's longest at 482 kilometres (300 miles), to prevent "gun smuggling". Israel claims that the weapons have fuelled a surge in violence in the predominantly Arab towns and cities in Israel and have been used against soldiers and civilians in the West Bank. Israeli daily *Maariv* claimed in August that over 40,000 people had breached the border with Jordan into the West Bank in recent months.

Also under threat is Jordan's control of the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem, the third holiest Muslim site, although access is under the control of Israeli security forces. Last month, Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir sparked outrage when he said that he would build a synagogue on the compound—the site of the Jewish temple destroyed 2000 years ago—a deliberate challenge to Abdullah's custodianship of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

Ben-Gvir has staged numerous provocations prompting sometimes violent reactions from Palestinians. He told Army Radio that Jews should be allowed to pray in the compound, claiming that the "current policy allows Jews to pray at this site." He has also threatened to collapse Netanyahu's coalition if he agrees any ceasefire in the Gaza war.

Earlier this month, a Jordanian truck driver killed three Israelis at the Allenby Bridge on the border between Jordan and Israel, near the city of Jericho, before Israeli soldiers shot him dead. The authorities on both sides have closed the crossing.

Abdullah, while making ritual statements opposing Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, has played the most open role in repressing popular opposition to Israel. Following the government's extension of the range and definition of a cybercrime to include "spreading fake news", "provoking strife",

"threatening societal peace" and "contempt for religions," the authorities have arrested scores of people taking part in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, according to Human Rights Watch.

Along with several other Arab states, Jordan has kept Israel's economy functioning during the war, providing a land corridor through the Kingdom to help Israel circumvent the Houthi attacks on Israeli-linked shipping in the Red Sea.

After an Israeli airstrike killed two Iranian generals and others in Damascus in April, Jordan came to Israel's defence when Tehran launched a widely trailed counterattack on Israel. The Jordanian Air Force shot down dozens of Iranian drones headed for Israel and Abdullah allowed Israeli fighter jets to enter Jordan's airspace and intercept Iranian missiles. Last month, the authorities took to the airwaves to deny that Israeli warplanes would be allowed to use its airspace to foil an expected attack by Iran after Israel's assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July, an announcement that was dismissed with contempt. Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi flew to Tehran to urge the Iranian regime to avoid Jordanian airspace in any retaliation against Israel.

Amman, Jordan's capital, is set to host NATO's first Middle East liaison office, as the prospect of a US-backed war between Israel and Iran and its allies mounts. The move suggest that NATO is seeking to organise its allies in the region more directly as indicated by the coordinated regional response, including by Jordan and Saudi Arabia, to Iran's missiles last April.

Discontent is mounting, exacerbating Abdullah's problems in keeping the lid on his restive and angry subjects. Official unemployment—likely much higher in reality—is 21 percent, well above its pre-COVID-19 rate of 15.1 percent between 2012 and 2019, with youth (46 percent) and women (31 percent) the worst affected. Wages for those in work—and many in the informal economy earn far less—are no more than \$3,000 a year. Poverty and inflation, especially the price of (mostly imported) food, are soaring. Many families are only kept afloat thanks to remittances from Jordanians working in the Gulf.

Jordan, like all the Arab regimes, has made a pact with the devil: to provide support for Israel and US imperialism—including in their moves towards war against Iran, as part of American preparations for war with China—in return for Washington's commitment to back their "security" in the event of a new mass movement to unseat them.



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