

Jordan clamps down on protests against Israel's Gaza genocide

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King Abdullah's regime in Jordan has played a crucial role in supporting Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza. His regime has not lifted a finger to support the Palestinians, but instead clamped down on daily protests in the capital Amman calling for an end to the war and the severing of the kingdom's links with Israel.

Riot police have used batons and tear gas and made dozens of arrests in a bid to disperse thousands of protesters who, since March 24, have taken to the streets around the Israeli embassy, demanding its closure and an end to all political and economic relations with Israel. Israel's ambassador was expelled in October and Jordan withdrew its ambassador in Tel Aviv in November.

Organised by the National Forum for Supporting the Resistance, demonstrators carried banners saying, "No to a Zionist embassy on Jordanian territory." They shouted, "Open the borders," a reference to Jordan's border with the occupied West Bank where Israeli settlers and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have gone on the rampage to drive the Palestinians into Jordan.

Last November, the Jordanian authorities banned protests close to the border with the West Bank for posing a threat to national security. The army has deployed extra forces on the border, while the security forces have arrested Jordanians trying to smuggle weapons into the West Bank.

The protests have crossed the divide that separates Jordan's traditional "Eastbanker" population (residing on the River Jordan's east bank) from the Palestinians both within Jordan and the West Bank. Around half of Jordan's 11 million population are of Palestinian descent, including more than 2.2 million registered Palestinian refugees—those driven there by wars between 1947 and 1967 and their descendants, of whom nearly 400,000 still live in 10 refugee camps.

Jordan was carved out of Greater Syria and Palestinian land east of the Jordan river by Britain after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. It operated as a client state to promote UK interests in the oil-rich region. Largely desert, it was dependent from the beginning on external aid, first from Britain and more recently from the United States, which currently provides \$1.45 billion a year in military and economic aid as well as security guarantees. Abdullah, a descendant of a

sheikh from the Arabian Peninsula assigned by British imperialism to rule Transjordan, depends on censorship, surveillance, and a system of military patronage. He appoints and dismisses prime ministers at will to deflect criticism away from his corrupt rule.

Unemployment is officially around 25 percent, and even higher among women and young people, while poverty has risen sharply since the pandemic, forcing many educated young people to seek work in the Gulf. As fears about Jordan's instability have grown, the European Union and the Gulf states have provided aid as well as funding to support 1.5 million Syrian refugees living in the country.

Jordan has maintained a "cold peace" with Israel following a US Clinton administration-brokered normalization treaty in 1994, signing around 15 trade and tourism agreements since then, most prominently the \$10 billion 2016 gas import agreement under which Israel would supply Jordan with 45 billion cubic metres of gas over 15 years.

However, amid widespread opposition to the Gaza war, Jordan was forced to recall its ambassador to Israel and to abandon the proposed water-for-energy deal with the country brokered by the United Arab Emirates in November, despite being one of the most water-scarce countries in the world.

Abdullah has thus far managed to contain the widespread opposition to Israel by publicly criticizing its conduct of the war and calling for a ceasefire, while playing the most open role in the Middle East in repressing popular opposition. Between October and November, security forces arrested at least 1,500 people—protesters and bystanders—during rallies in support of the Palestinians in Gaza for offences such as "committing acts of violence", "inciting discord" and "damaging public property." Some were only released on bail after pledging to stop participating in protests.

At least five more were arrested between November and December and charged under the Cybercrimes Law, passed in August last year, for social media posts expressing pro-Palestinian sympathies, criticizing the authorities' peace or economic deals with Israel, or calling for public strikes and protests. In January, Ayman Sanduka, political activist and mathematics professor, was sentenced to three months in jail for calling for a general strike and charged with "defaming an

official body.” Permission was only then granted for weekly Friday protests.

The regime has pressed ahead with its efforts to keep Israel’s economy functioning, providing a crucial “land bridge” for trucking vital goods overland from the Gulf to Israel as Yemen’s Houthis struck in the Red Sea against Israeli-linked shipping, in support of the Palestinians. In January, Israel’s *Channel 13* revealed that Jordan was exporting fruit and vegetables to Israel. According to an investigation by *Arabi Post*, citing Israel’s Ministry of Agriculture, Jordan and Turkey exported the most fruit and vegetables to Israel from October 7, 2023, to February 11 2024, amounting to 55 percent of all such imports.

These revelations led to a renewal of protests in February in Amman, Irbid, Aqaba, Karak and Zarqa. An online campaign was mounted for Jordan to send humanitarian aid to Gaza.

The latest protests that broke out at the end of March amid Israel’s attacks on Gaza’s al-Shifa Hospital and the pending invasion of Rafah have roiled Abdullah’s regime. Jordanian officials blamed Hamas leaders, especially former leader Khaled Meshaal, now resident in Doha, accusing the bourgeois clerical group, which was banished from Jordan in 1999, and the Muslim Brotherhood of seeking to destabilise the country.

On Tuesday, Muhannad Moubaydeen, a government spokesperson, told a press conference that the government was supposedly not opposed to the demonstrations but to the chants, which it views as pro-Hamas and harmful to national security. Former information minister Samih al-Maaytah said, “Hamas abroad is trying to pressure Jordan to restore relations with the movement,” citing a speech on March 26 in Amman by Meshaal calling on millions to take to the streets.

Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood has rejected these accusations, with Murad al-Adayleh, Secretary-General of the Islamic Action Front (IAF) which is affiliated to the Brotherhood, stating, “There are no special party interests in these protests, which represent all sectors of Jordanian society that support the Palestinian resistance.”

The widespread support for the Palestinians is a significant turning point. In 1970, in what became known as “Black September,” Abdullah’s father, King Hussein, turned to Israel for undercover support when he faced calls from some Palestinian factions, backed by Syria, for his overthrow. He was able to defeat Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and drive its leadership out of the country.

Since then, with Israel’s 360-kilometre border with Jordan—its longest—free from attacks by Palestinian militants, the Israeli military has been able to focus on securing its other borders. Jordan’s Palestinians have faced widespread discrimination, despite most being granted citizenship, with state employment and other policies favouring the Eastbankers.

Washington’s full-throated support for Israel has also resulted in an upsurge in anti-American sentiment in Jordan and across the wider region.

The logic of Israel’s war on Gaza implies driving out not only the Palestinians in Gaza, but those in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as Israel’s own Palestinian citizens. Israel’s mainstream politicians have for decades called for a population “transfer,” a euphemism for driving the Palestinians into Jordan—an event that would profoundly destabilise the monarchy.

For years, far-right settlers under the protection of the army have carried out attacks on the Palestinians in the West Bank to force them off their land. Now they do this with the active encouragement of Israel’s far-right politicians who have provided them with additional firearms, arousing fears of another Nakba or mass displacement as happened in 1948 and 1967. The Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas, acting as Israel’s policeman, has done nothing to protect its citizens.

This has forced the Jordanian parliament to unanimously endorse a motion to review its bilateral treaty with Israel that expressly forbids such an 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.”

The messianic Religious Zionists now in government have long viewed Jordan as part of “Greater Israel.” They were one of the many Zionist strands that opposed Britain’s partition of Palestine and its exclusion of Transjordan from its promise to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine as a “serious whittling down of the Balfour Declaration,” as Chaim Weizmann, later Israel’s first president, noted in his memoir. In March 2023, Bezalel Smotrich, Israel’s finance minister, took to the podium to display a map showing Jordan as part of “Greater Israel” while denying the existence of the Palestinian people.

These far-right forces and Israel’s ultra-orthodox parties are also challenging Jordan’s custodial role over Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the third most holy Muslim site. Jewish extremists and government officials have frequently stormed and desecrated the compound in preparation for seizing full control and establishing a Jewish temple.

Benjamin Netanyahu’s goal of erasing Hamas, with the full backing of US imperialism and its European allies, while Hezbollah in Lebanon has declared its commitment to ensuring a “Hamas victory in Gaza,” is driving towards a regional war against Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that would place Jordan firmly in the line of fire.



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