

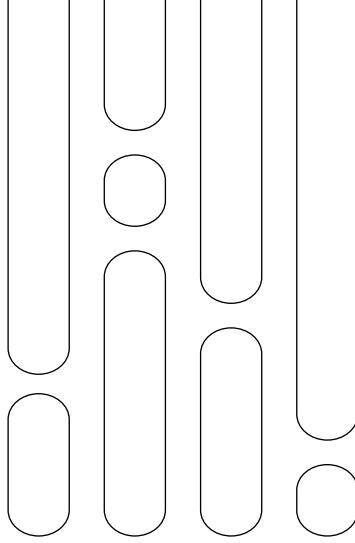
Report

THE HIDDEN HAND: IRAN AND JORDAN'S PROTESTS

April 14, 2024



RASANAH
المعهد الدولي للدراسات الإيرانية
International Institute for Iranian Studies



Contents

The Nature of the Protests.....	3
Iran’s Attempts at Extending Influence	3
Dimensions and Significations: Islamist Groups and Their Exploitation of Events	5
Conclusion	7



www.Rasanah-iiis.org

Jordan recently witnessed a massive protest movement organized by some political forces and parties — foremost of which are those who embrace Islamist ideology. Thousands of protesters attempted to reach the Israeli embassy — located in the Rabieh neighborhood of Jordan’s capital, Amman — against the backdrop of the Israeli war on Gaza. Security forces prevented the protesters from advancing, arresting dozens and firing teargas. Among the protesters’ demands are revoking the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel and closing the [Israeli](#) embassy. At the same time, Hamas leaders, along with commanders of Shiite armed groups, have made remarks that breach Jordan’s national security and threaten its unity and fabric. This raises questions about the extent of coordination and benefit on the part of Iran from the protest movement in Jordan.

The Nature of the Protests

The Jordanian authorities have capitalized on the element of time to mitigate the intensity of the protests in the capital, Amman. However, tensions escalated when Hamas leaders urged marches toward the occupied territories in the name of liberating Jerusalem, exacerbating the crisis in Jordan. Demonstrations have persisted, with gatherings occurring nightly. Protesters have voiced various slogans, including “Resistance is the choice of free people,” “Jordan and Palestine are blood brothers,” and “Amman and Gaza share one fate.” Notably, these slogans have not directly targeted the Jordanian government, likely to avoid provoking a harsher response. Nonetheless, in certain regions, tensions flared as some demonstrators attempted to insult state institutions or engage in violence, leading to arrests.

Regarding the leaders and organizers of these protests, they initially emerged spontaneously, but they have since been co-opted and steered by individuals and groups with political and ideological motivations. Foremost among these is the Muslim Brotherhood, which accused the Jordanian authorities of suppressing the [Rabieh](#) sit-in. In response, state representatives issued warnings, signaling a firm stance against any attempts to disrupt Jordan’s security and stability. The authorities have identified two primary threats to [Jordanian](#) stability: external forces, particularly [Iran](#), and internal elements like the Muslim Brotherhood. These dynamics will be further explored below.

Iran’s Attempts at Extending Influence

Iran’s efforts to exert influence in Jordan did not commence with the Israeli-Gaza conflict starting in October 2023; rather, these can be traced back to earlier initiatives. These endeavors involved attempts to sway Jordan through intermediary groups, as well as efforts to convert segments of the

Jordanian populace to Shiism and build public support in favor of Tehran. Iran sought to bolster its influence by promoting the establishment of Shiite *hussainiyas* (Shiite religious centers), facilitating tourist flights to shrines in Jordan, and deploying armed militias along Jordan's eastern borders in Iraq and northern borders in Syria. These actions indicate sustained efforts by Iran to extend its reach into Jordanian affairs.

During the height of the Israeli war on Gaza, Iraqi Shiite armed factions appeared near the Jordanian border under the guise of supporting Palestine, hindering oil truck crossings into Jordan. Jordanian officials interpreted this as an Iranian ploy to destabilize the country and exploit the Gaza situation to strain Jordanian ties with Iraq, furthering Iran's agenda. In January, Iraqi Kata'ib Hezbollah targeted a US base in [Jordan](#) amid the Gaza conflict. Following Israel's strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus and the killing of several [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\) commanders](#), including Mohammad Reza Zahedi, Shiite armed factions in Iraq, particularly Kata'ib Hezbollah, claimed to have severed the land route to Israel. Abu Ali al-Askari, Kata'ib Hezbollah's security official, declared the readiness of the "Islamic Resistance in Iraq" to supply "Islamic Resistance" fighters in Jordan with extensive weaponry, including light and medium arms, anti-armor launchers, tactical missiles, vast amounts of ammunition, and explosives. Askari further stated, "We are prepared to initiate preparations, with the approval of our comrades in Hamas or Islamic Jihad. Let's commence by obstructing the land route leading to the [Zionist](#) regime." This declaration carries significant risk, as it implies the arming of what he refers to as "brothers in the Islamic resistance" in Jordan, following recommendations from Hamas and Jihad. Importantly, this indicates a willingness to arm not just Shiite groups within Jordan, but rather Islamist factions associated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Such a declaration heightens concerns over potential escalation and underscores the complexity of regional dynamics. Tehran's military efforts to infiltrate Jordan are not solely spurred by the Israeli conflict with Gaza; they have been ongoing for some time. Evidence of this predates recent events, as far back as 2016 when an Iranian drone was intercepted in southern Syria. This drone carried images of significant Jordanian locations, indicating Tehran's interest in the country's affairs. Furthermore, the presence of Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and other Shiite factions in southern Syria, near the [Jordanian](#) border, suggests a sustained effort by Iran to extend its influence into Jordanian territory.

Soft Iranian efforts to infiltrate Jordan extend beyond military means to include initiatives targeting Shiite tourists and shrines. In July 2023, former Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Mamdouh al-Abadi proposed

welcoming Shiite tourists and facilitating their visits, a suggestion that met with controversy and rejection by other officials due to concerns over national security. Jordan hosts significant shrines revered in Shiite culture, such as the shrine of Jaafar al-Tayyar, making it a focal point for Iranian interest. Iran has sought to establish husayniyyas (large halls that Shiites use for ceremonies) in Mu'tah; a town in Karak Governorate in Jordan, but faced [opposition](#). Moreover, the [Iranian](#) embassy in Amman has engaged in cultural outreach efforts, including organizing religious and cultural events and collaborating with writers and intellectuals, to foster an environment conducive to Iranian influence. These various tactics illustrate Iran's multi-faceted approach to infiltrating Jordanian society and institutions.

Dimensions and Significations: Islamist Groups and Their Exploitation of Events

There are dangerous implications arising from consecutive statements by Hamas leaders urging Jordanians to march toward Israel. Hamas published a recording of Muhammad al-Deif [urging](#) all Muslims to join the fight to liberate Al-Aqsa mosque saying, "Our people in Jordan and Lebanon, in Egypt, Algeria, and the Maghreb, in Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia and across the Islamic world, start marching now, not tomorrow, toward Palestine, and do not let borders, regimes, and restrictions deprive you of the honor of waging Jihad and taking part in the liberation of the al-Aqsa Mosque." In a speech delivered by Khaled Meshaal at a women's event in [Amman](#), Jordan, he urged the masses of the nation to participate in what he termed as the "battle of the Al-Aqsa Flood." Meshaal emphasized the necessity for the blood of the nation to unite with that of the Palestinian people until victory is achieved, expressing confidence that the conflict will ultimately end in favor of their cause, with the will of God Almighty. Jordanian government spokesman Muhannad al-Mubaidin criticized the statements made by Hamas leaders, which encourage border breaches and marches toward Israel. He labeled these statements as [politically](#) immature and cautioned against their potential to sway Jordanian public opinion against the country's political leadership. However, the spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan offered a different perspective, suggesting that some of the implications attributed to the statements may [not have been initially intended](#).

The incitement by Hamas in Jordan serves strategic goals for the movement. By provoking unrest in Jordan, Hamas aims to broaden the conflict's scope, alerting regional and international players to the escalating danger. This tactic is intended to pressure a halt to the Gaza conflict and to compel action against Israel. Hamas recognizes Jordan's strategic vulnerabilities,

including its compact size, demographic makeup with a significant number of its population of Palestinian origin, and its proximity to Israel and Iraq's Shiite-dominated regions. Additionally, Iran's aspirations for a direct route to Israel through Jordan add to the complexity. Hamas believes that any destabilization in Jordan would prompt swift intervention from regional and international actors, aiming to prevent further escalation of the conflict.

The timing of Hamas' statements is notable, coming shortly after several of its leaders visited Tehran and met with Iranian officials, including the country's leader. This raises questions about potential coordination between Hamas and armed Shiite factions aligned with Iran during times of heightened tension. While the Hezbollah Brigades threatened to arm Jordanians and disrupt land routes under the recommendation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, it is noteworthy that the group overlooked a direct route to Israel via Syria and the Golan Heights, instead focusing on Jordanian routes. Hamas, in its senior leaders' statements, urged Jordanians, particularly tribes, to march toward Israel. However, they did not call on Syrians to march toward Israel; this move aligned with Iran's stance. Iran realizes the difficulty of arming 12,000 fighters in Jordan because of the vigilance of Jordanian security services, the stable societal fabric of Jordan, and the support from Arab and regional entities, which mitigate the feasibility of such an action. Hamas leaders recognize the impracticality of any advance toward Israel, understanding the potential for Israeli violence and international condemnation. Such actions could threaten not only Israeli security but also jeopardize stability in Jordan. Despite this, the coordinated statements between Iran and Hamas aim to exert pressure on multiple fronts. Firstly, they seek to pressure the Jordanian government to halt the land route to Israel, thereby urging Israel to cease its military actions. Secondly, these statements aim to escalate tensions in the region, compelling regional actors to seek de-escalation. However, the call for Jordanians to march toward Palestinian territories lacks a clear strategy and fails to consider the potential consequences, reminiscent of previous violent incidents such as the October 7 operation.

Another aspect related to Iran's intentions is its attempt to neutralize Jordan and compel it to establish diplomatic ties and improve relations with it. This is particularly significant considering the strained relationship between the two countries over the years. Iran seeks to leverage this improved relationship to implement religious and cultural projects in Jordan, despite Jordan's historical reluctance and apprehension regarding Iran's true motives. Additionally, Iran aims to encircle Israel through Jordan, utilizing it as a new focal point and tool, particularly as Iranian influence in Syria faces challenges due to ongoing Israeli attacks on IRGC officials, military advisors, and Irani-

an positions of influence. Consequently, Jordan holds immense importance for Iranian decision-makers, serving as a direct gateway to Israel. Success in establishing a foothold in Jordan would enable Tehran to exert pressure on Israel, the region and the international community, similar to its influence in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon.

On the flip side, the Jordanian authorities remain vigilant and cognizant of the extent of Iranian and Muslim Brotherhood agendas, issuing repeated warnings against them. The likelihood of demonstrations expanding to impact Jordan's decision-making apparatus, let alone the stability of the state, is minimal. This is primarily due to the Jordanian populace's awareness of both external and internal schemes orchestrated by Iran and Islamist groups. Furthermore, Jordan's robust state structure, reinforced by its monarchy with deep-rooted customs and traditions, serves as a bulwark against destabilizing influences. Additionally, regional and international stakeholders concerned with Jordan's stability lend their support to bolster Jordanian security. They are well-versed in the Iranian and Islamist strategies that have led to the collapse of other nations in the region, resulting in severe ramifications for regional security. Notably, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Prince Mohammed bin Salman have unequivocally expressed support for Jordan's stability, reaffirming the kingdom's solidarity and endorsing all measures undertaken by King Abdullah II to safeguard his country's security and stability.

Conclusion

Iran, in coordination with armed Shiite factions in Iraq and Islamist groups in Jordan, aims to exert pressure on the Jordanian state. While ostensibly framed as support for Gaza and an attempt to halt the land route to Israel, the true objective is to manipulate Jordanian decision-making and establish a foothold in a strategically vital region. This effort is part of a broader strategy to encircle Israel, assert Tehran's influence in regional affairs, and undermine other regional actors in favor of Iran. It appears that there is coordination between the Iranians, armed Shiite factions in Iraq and Islamists in Jordan to pressure the Jordanian government and create chaos, potentially expanding the conflict's scope. However, the Jordanian government has responded decisively, vowing to address any attempts to undermine national security. The calls to arm fighters in Jordan by armed Shiite factions or to march toward Jerusalem, as urged by Hamas leaders, are seen as politically motivated and impractical maneuvers. This underscores the adeptness of Islamist groups and Iranians in employing such actions, often characterized as a policy of deterrence. However, there remains the possibility that Iran, through its armed factions, might attempt to arm fighters within Jordan or

incite Islamist movements to escalate their activities, potentially turning them into violent movements against the state's interests and institutions. This could occur, especially if pressure on Iran intensifies and threatens its strategic influence in the region. While this option may seem impractical or irrational, it remains a possibility for Tehran to consider.



✉ info@rasanahiiis.com

🐦 [@rasanahiiis](#) [@rasanahiiis](#)

🌐 www.rasanah-iiis.org

