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POLICY COMPASS
The Growing Risks of Jordan's
Dependence on Washington

By
Gulf State Analytics



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Executive Summary

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- ✧ Jordan's long-standing strategy of relying on powerful allies is now exposing the kingdom to greater risks, as its close relationship with the United States has made it vulnerable to conflicts involving Washington.
- ✧ The 2026 U.S.-Israeli war with Iran has challenged Jordan's assumption that its alliance with Washington can guarantee security, because Iranian missiles and drones have struck Jordanian territory and U.S. military facilities there.
- ✧ Jordan's claim of neutrality in the U.S.-Iran conflict is increasingly difficult to sustain, because hosting U.S. military forces makes the kingdom a target for Iranian retaliation even though Amman did not initiate the war.
- ✧ U.S. military cooperation provides Jordan with important defensive capabilities but simultaneously increases its exposure, creating a situation in which the alliance that protects Jordan also makes it more vulnerable.
- ✧ Iran's apparent shift toward targeting Jordan more directly raises concerns about the kingdom's deterrence, particularly as Tehran adjusts its military pressure westward in response to changes in the U.S. military presence.
- ✧ Jordan's restrained response to Iranian attacks contrasts sharply with its forceful military response to ISIS in 2015, potentially creating concerns that Iran may conclude it can attack Jordan without facing significant consequences.
- ✧ Domestic opposition to Jordan's relationships with the United States and Israel is growing, especially because of the devastating war in Gaza and Jordan's close historical and demographic ties to the Palestinian issue.
- ✧ The Jordanian government faces a widening gap between its national security calculations and public opinion, as citizens may view actions such as intercepting Iranian missiles as assistance to Israel or the United States rather than simply as territorial self-defence.
- ✧ Jordan's economic dependence on external assistance, particularly from the United States, limits its ability to fundamentally change its foreign-policy strategy, while regional instability is simultaneously damaging tourism, disrupting energy supplies, and increasing costs.
- ✧ The kingdom is unlikely to abandon either its U.S. alliance or its peace treaty with Israel, but the Iran crisis is forcing Amman to reconsider how it manages these relationships, because the kingdom has few viable alternatives for securing foreign protection without becoming entangled in its allies' wars.

Key Picture: Map of Jordan and Its Regional Borders



Source: [ACE USA](#)

Introduction

For many decades the leadership in Jordan has assessed that a foreign policy oriented around the maintenance of close relationships with powerful countries can ensure the kingdom's stability and security. Amman has cultivated an unusually close alliance with Washington, upheld a peace treaty with Israel, and positioned itself as a reliable, moderate partner in a turbulent region. Yet the 2026 U.S.-Israeli war on Iran has exposed the vulnerabilities of that strategy. Iranian missiles and drones have crossed Jordanian airspace and struck targets inside the kingdom, while U.S. military bases on Jordanian soil have made the country a target precisely because of, not despite, its alliance with Washington. At home, meanwhile, cooperation with Washington and Tel Aviv has become increasingly controversial, particularly amid the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Jordan therefore faces serious dilemmas that go far beyond the immediate conflict. A key question is how can a small state preserve the alliances on which its security depends without becoming a battlefield for the wars of its more powerful partners?

An Alliance That Has Made Jordan More Vulnerable

The Jordanian state's nature sits at the root of the country's predicament. Lacking natural resources and surrounded by countries with greater military, economic, and geopolitical weight, Jordan has often been

exposed to regional wars and crises beyond Amman's control. By forming strong relationships with the United States and other powerful external actors, Jordan has long depended on military facilities, intelligence cooperation, and economic support from allies to maintain relative stability in a difficult neighborhood. With King Abdullah II at the helm, Jordan has increasingly prioritised its alliance with Washington, and this relationship has delivered Amman significant benefits. However, this strategy has also resulted in the kingdom growing dependent on the United States for security. The Iran crisis of 2026 has forced Jordanian officials to revisit assumptions about Washington being a powerful ally capable of protecting the country and enabling it to stay out of wars plaguing the Middle East.

In the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, Jordan has repeatedly stressed that it is not a belligerent in the conflict. The kingdom has sought to protect its own territory instead of participating in hostilities against the Islamic Republic. However, Jordanian neutrality in this conflict is difficult to sustain when Iran's missiles and drones are attacking U.S. military bases on its soil. Put simply, while these bases in Jordan have long been critical nodes in Washington's military posture in the Middle East, these American aircraft, missile-defence systems, and other military assets have made Jordan a major target for Tehran's retaliation against the United States and Israel's attack on Iran.

As a result, Jordan plays the role of a country hosting a large U.S. military presence and that of an Arab state seeking neutrality in a regional conflict. Jordanian security forces, to their credit, have successfully intercepted many Iranian drones and missiles albeit with the help of American systems.¹ Nonetheless, Jordan is a facilitator of U.S. aggression against the Islamic Republic in Tehran's eyes. For Amman, these conditions leave Jordan in an extremely negative strategic position whereby the kingdom is expected to benefit from an alliance that subjects it to high levels of insecurity due to a conflict that Amman did not initiate and has no ability to control.

Jordan's Deterrence Dilemma

Compounding Amman's deteriorating security environment is the growing indication that Iran's military operations are becoming increasingly focused on Jordan. Although Tehran's strikes for a two-week span in July 2026 were concentrated primarily on U.S. military facilities in Kuwait and Bahrain, that geographic pattern has been shifting. As Washington reduces its military footprint at positions closer to Iran, Tehran appears to be recalibrating the geography of its pressure, extending the reach of its operations westward. What was previously a peripheral exposure to a conflict centered farther east is therefore becoming a more direct security challenge, leaving Jordan increasingly vulnerable to Iran's evolving military posture as the kingdom's territory, airspace, and alliance with Washington assume a more central role in the regional crisis.

The extent to which Iran has hit Jordan raises fundamental questions about Amman's deterrence capacity. Perhaps it is useful to draw a comparison to 2015 when the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) barbarically killed Jordan's pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh and the Jordanian military responded with an intense air campaign against the extremist group's targets in Syria and Iraq.² That decisive response sent ISIS a clear message about the serious consequences that come with any attack on Jordan and its citizens. Fast forward to 2026, the response to Iran has been significantly different with officials in Amman condemning Tehran's attacks and stressing Jordan's right to self-defence but not carrying out retaliatory strikes against the Islamic Republic. Granted, this restraint is built on many layers of pragmatism considering the extent to which Iran's military has substantial capabilities and Amman's vested interests in avoiding any escalation with Tehran that the Jordanians would be extremely challenged to contain. Nonetheless, there are valid concerns about Jordan's restraint sending Iran a message about its ability to strike the kingdom without paying a significant cost, which risks making Jordan a more frequent target amid the U.S.-Iran crisis that shows no sign of winding down in the short term.³

Balancing Foreign Alliances Against Domestic Opinion

As is the case for all countries, Jordan's foreign policy cannot be entirely separated from its domestic politics. Amman's close alliance with Washington and 1994 peace treaty with Tel Aviv are difficult for Jordan's leadership

to defend publicly, particularly amid the carnage in Gaza since October 2023. Home to a large Palestinian population and having played a major role in Palestine's modern history, Jordan and its citizens are deeply tied to today's question of Palestine. There is no denying that Jordan's bilateral cooperation with Israel has become ever more unpopular among Jordanian citizens who are enraged over the past few years of developments in Gaza and the West Bank.⁴

The same can be said about the kingdom's alliance with the United States. Each time Jordanian military forces intercept Iran's missiles headed toward Israel or American bases in Jordan, there are voices that depict Amman as helping Washington and Tel Aviv, rather than agreeing with the government's official line about those actions being about defending the kingdom's own territory. In sum, there is a growing gap between the government's calculations regarding national security and public attitudes. The leadership in Amman faces a difficult challenge as it seeks to reassure the Trump administration that Jordan remains Washington's close and dependable ally while also seeking to convince its own population that the kingdom is not beholden to either the United States or Israel. As the regional security crisis remains dangerous, this balancing act is always difficult for officials in Amman.

Jordan's economic vulnerabilities compound the kingdom's security dilemmas with the regional crisis harming the tourism industry, disrupting energy supplies, and causing costs to rise. Making matters more difficult is the reality that Jordan is economically dependent on assistance from Washington, meaning that the country is not in a position to easily escape its alliance with the United States.

A Difficult Search for Strategic Alternatives

Looking ahead, although it is extremely unlikely that Jordan would either abandon its alliance with the United States or abrogate the 1994 peace treaty with Israel, the U.S.-Iran crisis is forcing the kingdom to revisit its approaches to managing relations with Washington and Tel Aviv. However, the simple truth is that Amman has no easy options for finding a way to remain protected by the United States and other allies while preventing Jordan from being trapped in a regional war started by Washington and Tel Aviv.

NOTES

¹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/jordan-says-it-intercepted-8-missiles-that-breached-its-airspace/4042067>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/jordan-says-its-airstrikes-are-targeting-islamic-state-leadership/2015/02/08/431cfc88-63f0-4acd-b005-94d6661aae3a_story.html

³ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/jordans-military-deterrence-has-collapsed/>

⁴ <https://www.dw.com/en/jordan-faces-growing-risk-of-becoming-latest-frontline-state-in-us-iran-conflict/a-78055209>