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Wadi Araba: Jordan's 'Agreement of Shame'

Thirty years after making peace with the occupation state, Jordan finds itself reduced to a strategic buffer zone that exists for Israeli security – caught between broken promises and ongoing violations that pose a dangerous threat to its sovereignty and regional standing.

The [Wadi Araba Agreement](#), signed in 1994 by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordanian King Hussein bin Talal, gave its signatories little time to savor its potential impact. Rabin was assassinated just a year later, and Hussein succumbed to illness five years after that.

Yet, [three decades](#) on, the agreement's tainted legacy has been dumped directly onto the Jordanian people, leaving them caught between the rigid terms accepted by their government despite the ongoing Israeli expansionist policies in the neighboring West Bank – where countless Palestinians possess Jordanian citizenship.

The [preamble](#) of the agreement proclaims an idealistic vision of "overcoming psychological barriers and promoting human dignity." However, the only barriers breached have been those between the ruling elites and a handful of wealthy businessmen.

The 'Agreement of Shame'

The wider Jordanian public, by contrast, has remained outspoken in opposition – praising the Palestinian resistance, supporting [Jordanian resistance operations](#) on the border, expressing solidarity with Lebanon, condemning the Israeli occupation, and protesting outside its embassy. Indeed, the Wadi Araba agreement has long been dubbed the "[Agreement of Shame](#)" by many Jordanians.

On the 30th anniversary of this accord, the numerous Israeli violations of the agreement have come into sharper focus, especially after the Operation Al-Aqsa Flood operation of 7 October 2023. This raises serious questions about the actions of the Hashemite Kingdom: is it showing leniency, or merely hesitating?

The Wadi Araba agreement itself has been mangled to serve as justification for policies that, in some cases, actively facilitate Tel Aviv's interests. An example of this is when a renowned [Jordanian artist](#) was detained and prosecuted simply for attempting to paint a mural of Palestinian resistance leader and martyr [Yahya Sinwar](#) on the walls of the Baqaa refugee camp.

While no definitive evidence suggests that Israel used Jordanian airspace in last month's [attacks on Iran](#), a look back at 13 April reveals that Amman [allowed Israeli fighter jets](#) to operate in its skies to counter Iranian drones and missiles launched during "Operation True Promise 1," according to an Israeli Air Force officer.

Jordan's sovereignty in jeopardy

In July, Jordan also announced the opening of the [first NATO liaison office](#) in the West Asia and North Africa region, raising questions about the implications of such a move amidst ongoing regional conflicts. The entrance of NATO into Amman has further reinforced the perception that Jordan's "sovereignty" is increasingly compromised.

Earlier this year, Hebrew Channel 13 [reported](#) that cargo ships docked in the UAE are unloaded and transported by truck through Saudi Arabia, into Jordan, and eventually across the Jordan River into Israel, continuing on to Haifa.

What should have been a mutually desired peace between two neighboring states, grounded in UN charters and international law, has instead devolved into an outright Israeli encroachment on Jordan's regional standing and political independence – in other words, an "insult," as one Jordanian political source tells *The Cradle*.

These assertions contradict the [announcement](#) of the Jordanian armed forces in an official statement that "no military aircraft were allowed to cross Jordanian airspace by the warring parties in the region," describing talk about the crossing of Israeli planes as "rumors that are not based on facts."

Regardless, the facts reveal otherwise. A statement from Iraq's Kataib Hezbollah, received by *The Cradle*, confirms that there is intelligence indicating "the use of the lands of Jordan and the Hejaz desert as a corridor for Israeli aircraft," which "would not have happened without the existence of an agreement and premeditation with the Americans" who control Iraqi airspace.

The Iraqi government also [lodged an official protest](#) with the UN and the Security Council regarding Israeli violations of Iraqi airspace during attacks on Iran – violations that, according to the Jordanian source, also damaged Amman’s diplomatic relations with Baghdad and showed blatant disregard for Jordan's stability and interests.

A British-made buffer zone

On the 30th anniversary of the accords between Amman and Tel Aviv, David Schenker, who previously held the position of US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, writes in the [National Interest](#) magazine, “At the professional echelons of the state’s military and intelligence agencies, cooperation has never been better.”

If true, this raises serious concerns. Was there prior coordination with the Jordanian regime, or did Israel simply ignore Jordanian sovereignty in its military actions while Amman helpfully looked the other way?

It is not possible to imagine that about 100 Israeli Air Force fighter jets crossed into the skies of Jordan toward Iraq without prior “coordination” with the Jordanian regime, or that it completely ignored Jordanian “sovereignty” and crossed without permission.

In either case, the situation reveals a troubling dynamic. Israel not only violated Jordan's sovereignty but has also risked dragging the country deeper into a regional war and placing it at odds with its direct Arab neighbors. By implicating Jordan as an ally in [one regional axis against another](#), Israel's actions have clearly breached the Wadi Araba Agreement's principles.

King Abdullah's response – or lack thereof – has only intensified the controversy. He could have openly rejected these violations and, as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, ordered the interception of Israeli aircraft entering Jordanian airspace.

Instead, reports suggest he allowed Israeli fighters to operate freely to counter Iranian threats, contrasting sharply with Jordan's proactive defense – in aid of Israel, it so happens – against dangers coming from the east, such as Iranian missiles and drones.

The recent crossing of Israeli planes through Jordanian airspace appears to be a cynical test of the so-called "Hussein–Rabin Agreement." By gradually accepting these actions, Abdullah II has turned Jordan into little more than a geographic buffer zone – a strategic extension of Israel's security reach.

Breached terms and waning authority

The Wadi Araba Agreement, in Article Two, outlines respect and recognition of each country's territorial integrity. Yet, as the Jordanian source highlights, Israeli aircraft en

route to attack Iran have no business within Jordanian territory, nor do they contribute to Amman's security.

Article Three asserts that both parties should regard international borders as inviolable. If Israel's actions were indeed unauthorized, they constitute a blatant breach of a key clause, yet no official Jordanian protest has been heard.

Similar questions arise regarding Article Four, which calls for effective measures to prevent hostility or violence from each other's territories, explicitly including airspace. If Jordanian airspace was used without consent, Tel Aviv clearly violated this provision, and Amman's silence only invites further encroachment.

Another section of the agreement prohibits either party from forming alliances with third parties that could lead to aggression against the other. Jordan's perceived weakness in the face of an Israel bolstered by western support has rendered it the junior partner in the relationship.

With diminished ties and alliances compared to the 1980s and 1990s, Jordan – particularly during Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq – hoped that the Wadi Araba Agreement would [provide security and stability](#) for the kingdom. Instead, Jordan has conceded to Israeli ambitions, which extend across the entire region, from Iraq and Iran in the east to Syria in the north and Palestine in the west.

Clause Five of Article Four reiterates the commitment to prevent terrorism, sabotage, and violence from being launched from either party's territory. Yet Israeli disdain for Jordan's sovereignty has never been more apparent.

Unfulfilled promises and Israeli ambitions

The broader principles of the treaty even include preventing forced population movements that could negatively impact either party. Thirty years ago, this was a diplomatic euphemism aimed at ensuring Jordan would prevent Palestinian refugees from organizing to return to their homeland.

Yet today, ruling, mainstream factions in Israel openly advocate for policies that would [push Palestinians into Jordan](#), viewing the eastern bank of the Jordan River as part of their historical land.

Two key points in Clause Seven – establishing a zone free of hostile alliances and creating a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in West Asia – are aspirations that Israel has shown little interest in upholding.

As the 30th anniversary of the Wadi Araba Agreement passes, it is clear that the accord has largely served the interests of the Israeli state, which sees it as a convenient security arrangement while treating Jordan with neglect and contempt.

King Hussein bequeathed to his son not only a monarchy but also an agreement that Israel has continually mocked, yet never so acutely as over the past year. This has transformed the Hashemite Kingdom into a mere Arab buffer zone for Israeli security – an early warning system for threats from the east front, particularly [Iraq](#) and Iran.

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