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# Jordanian's Gulf Positions vis-a-vis the Syrian Crisis

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## Abstract

The study aims to investigate Jordanian's Gulf Positions vis-a-vis the Syrian Crisis via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, Jordanian policy guided by the Jordanian Monarch King Abdullah the Second has borne fruit by keeping Jordan secure and stable in the shadow of a flammable and conflict-ridden environment. In conclusion, Jordan adopted the Syrian crisis policy of buying time-awaiting the direction of events in the diplomatic and military aspects without angering its Gulf or American allies.

**Keywords:** Jordan, Gulf, Syrian Crisis, War.

## Posiciones del Golfo de Jordania ante la crisis siria

### Resumen

El estudio tiene como objetivo investigar las posiciones del Golfo de Jordania frente a la crisis siria a través de métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, la política jordana guiada por el Rey Monarca jordano Abdullah II ha dado sus frutos al mantener a Jordania segura y estable a la sombra de un entorno inflamable y conflictivo. En conclusión, Jordan adoptó la política de crisis siria de ganar tiempo esperando la dirección de los acontecimientos en los aspectos diplomáticos y militares sin enojar a sus aliados del Golfo o de los Estados Unidos.

**Palabras clave:** Jordania, Golfo, Crisis siria, Guerra.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jordan has not clearly and explicitly defined its interests relating to the Syrian crisis which touch on its northern border. However, it has stated more than once its concern and apprehension about their impact on its stability and security, particularly since it exists in an inflamed environment; war in Syria and chaos in Iraq, and a mysterious trajectory of the peace process which it fears it will pay a price for, without knowing the outcome, and a role it must perform for Saudi Arabia or the Gulf as a natural and trusted nexus between Greater Syria and the Gulf (MOAWATH, 2010; NIKKU, & RAFIQUE, 2019).

And with the outbreak of the *intifadas* of the Arab Spring in 2010, the Gulf states mobilized themselves to adopt firm and unprecedented policies vis some vis the Middle East. Thus some of the GCC states called for the ejection from power of the Bashar Asad regime in Syria, where it viewed it as an opportunity to diminish Iranian influence in the region. However, with the continuance of the conflict the various priorities and calculations of those countries became clarified: hence, given that there are different calculations on the part of states within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), then what of the calculations and interests of a state like Jordan reeling in geographic, historical and human proximity to

the Syrian crisis? (TODMAN, 2016; SHABBIR, ABBAS, AMAN, & ALI, 2019).).

It is clear that the fate of the Syrian crisis- nebulous and complex- will not just determine the future of Syria itself, but will also have serious ramifications for the future of the regional Arab system as a whole, and for the Gulf states naturally. Therefore, it may be stated that the process of Jordan Gulf agreements has undergone two separate and distinct albeit integrated stages (BANK,2016):

First stage: This is the stage in which Jordan and the GCC states (excepting Oman), since the start of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, agreed on the necessity of ejecting Asad from power given that this would diminish Iranian influence in the region, and this at least was what was understood from the interview of King Abdullah the Second with the BBC on 24 November 2011 (PATRICK, 2013).

As to the second stage, some of the Gulf states assumed positions that are tougher and more determined against the Syrian political regime, and provided political and moral support to the Syrian people to demand its freedom, where this proclivity was led by both Saudi Arabia and Qatar which became at the vanguard of the Gulf states and indeed the Arab states which espouse a stringent dealing with the Syrian regime through a clear role in referring the Syrian file to the Security Council for decisive action, and to freeze diplomatic representation with Damascus. Moreover, there was a call to arm the Syrian opposition represented in the Free Syria army, and to recognize the Syrian National Council as the sole official representative of the

Syrian nation (NAJJAR, 2011; USAK, KUBIATKO, SHABBIR, DUDNIK, JERMSITTIPARSERT, & RAJABION, 2019).

In this stage, some of the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, applied great pressure on Jordan to intervene directly and with greater effectiveness in the Syrian crisis in terms of bringing in arms and personnel into Syria through its northern border at an early time of the Syria conflict (FIKRI, 2012).

On its part, Jordan does not wish to play such a role by succumbing to Gulf pressures for fear of causing instability in the country, where it was extremely cautious, balancing between domestic and external pressures, for Syria has a border of around 475 km, and has Syrian refugees of a number of 1.4 million in the year 2016 among whom 650,000 arrived as a result of the crisis and 750,000 refugees who were originally residing in Jordan; and they, in addition to being an economic and social burden constitute, in one way or another, a security time bomb. On the other hand, Jordan's position is congruent with the Arab agenda and initiatives, particularly the Gulf positions, which call for the abdication of the Syrian president Bashar Assad, even though concurrently promoting a political solution, just like Bahrain and Kuwait (STATIK & MAHMOUD, 2013).

## **2. METHODOLOHY**

As to Qatar it was not able to play an influential role in the Syrian crisis as it had done in Libya, where there were numerous

factors that propitiated for it to play a role that rivaled that of Jordan and the other Gulf states such as: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and hence, the actions of Qatar vis a vis the Syrian crisis were generally through the collective institutional frameworks such as the Arab League; for Qatar is a small and a remote country, and does not possess the necessary capacity to individually intervene in the Syrian crisis which brings it close to the Jordanian, Kuwaiti and Bahraini position, while the Sultanate of Oman's positions did not converge with those of the Gulf states which reject the idea of the internationalization of the Syrian crisis, the arming of the opposition, and removing legitimacy from the regime, where Oman was the first Arab state that broke the diplomatic isolation of the Syrian regime as evidenced in the visit of its Alawite foreign minister on 26 October 2015 bearing peace proposals, where this position of Oman may be construed under the rubric of the general framework of Omani foreign policy which mostly favors neutrality and avoidance of embroilment in regional conflicts, not to mention the cooperation relations between Oman and Iran which is considered a basic player in the Syrian crisis; for instance, Oman assumed a cautious position vis a vis the Egyptian and Syrian file, while both Saudi Arabia and Qatar entered with full force, to apply pressure and influence the conflicting parties in those countries (ANAN, 2017).

In this context it must be explained that there are temporal watersheds which illuminate the Jordanian position and the pressures to which it was exposed in order to conform to the Gulf visions particularly those of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Thus it may be observed

that there was change in the Jordanian position vis some vis the Syrian crisis rooted in the attempt of Jordan to reconcile between the national Jordanian interests and its cooperative relationship with the Gulf states, it being noted that the Jordanian strategic interests were preeminently present in all the strategies.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

In the shadow of the continuance of the conflict in Syria and the war entering its seventh year, and in the shadow of the presence of horizons for reaching a political solution putting an end to destruction and instability in the Middle East, and with the growing threat of transnational groups leading to a multi-layered conflict (an armed conflict between the regime and the opposition, a sectarian conflict nourished by the intervention of Iraqi, Lebanese and Iranian groups in the Syrian crisis, a conflict of national and international axes, and a conflict against terrorism represented in Al-Qaeda, ISIS and others on Syrian soil) all made Jordanian-Gulf movement in the Syrian arena to be calculated and precise, which primarily serves the priority of national security for each state separately; hence Jordanian Gulf interests intersect insofar as that the policy of the Gulf states (except Oman) are grounded in resisting Iranian expansion in Syria at any price, while Jordan differs with the Gulf states insofar as the benefits from changing the Syrian regime which would weaken Iran but would be in the interest of the Islamic groups.



On the ground, Jordan continues to be a base for the Syrian opposition both military and political, and hence, Jordan is hostage to the axis to which it belongs represented in Saudi Arabia and America, and it fears for one of the two quarters to drive it to heightened engagement in the Syrian crisis without there being a clear roadmap or certainty about what the future holds. Specifically, Riyadh continues to be inclined to escalation in Syria, given that Jordan will be enshrouded with greater uncertainty in case the Saudi and American agendas diverge in this regard.

Accordingly, Jordan adopted the policy of positive uncertainty which allows Jordan to take time to mull its decisions and to implement studied policies leading to safeguarding its national security on the one hand, and also protect its relations with the neighboring states and the region particularly the Gulf states and their major ally in the region, the United States of America (SHQEIR, 2014; SHABBIR, ABBAS, AMAN, & ALI, 2019).

Strategically speaking, it is the view of Saudi Arabia, which is considered the most influential state in terms of the general foreign policy of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, that the Jordanian position is an important part of Saudi security, and that any overt Jordanian policy vis some vis the Syrian conflict could threaten the Jordanian regime, and by corollary would threaten Saudi security and the Gulf in its entirety. This is why Mr. Awad Al-Badi, the director of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh says that the position of Jordan is wise as relates to its national security; for while the Gulf states are incapable of significantly

influencing events in Syrian territories, they are aware of the importance of the Jordanian role, and hence they must more effectively alleviate the burdens on Jordan stemming from the crisis and pressures it suffers due to the crisis by providing economic grants. Hence, the Gulf Cooperation Council decided in its session (32) convened in December of 2011 to allocate a grant in the amount of 5 billion US Dollars, to finance development projects in Jordan over a 5-year period. According to this decision it was agreed at the time to divide this amount between all of Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar in the amount of 1.25 Billion Dollars for each state, and it appears that Jordan is asking the Gulf states to renew this grant but to no avail, particularly in the shadow of plummeting oil prices, and the exorbitant war bill in Syria and Yemen.

On the other hand, irrespective of the magnitude of the intervention of Jordan and the Gulf states in the Syrian crisis which is entering its seventh year, it is clear that there are some differences and convergences between Jordan and some Gulf states concerning the view towards some of the 5 conflicting parties in Syria, such as: The Syrian regime and its allies, the Kurds, the Free Army, Isis, and Al-Qaeda. In general, the Gulf states held a position towards ejecting the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria, but the difference pivoted around the quarters that would be supported and prepared for the post Assad stage; whereas Jordan and Saudi support the moderate factions of the Free Army in southern Syria, where the former takes into consideration the Syrian Jordanian geography, Qatar and Turkey focus on supporting and assisting combatants with a more Islamic jihadi

orientation. On the other hand, Jordan, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are close in their opposition to ISIS while the Qatari position is more uncertain vis some vis the war on ISIS or at least Al-Nusra which intermittently enters into alliance with ISIS.

The following table shows the alliances and divergences between Jordan and the Gulf states insofar as the actors in the Syrian crisis:

State	Assad Regime	Free Army	Kurds	ISIS	AL-Qaeda
Saudi Arabia	Illegitimate	Support	Neutral	State of war	State of war
Kuwait	Illegitimate	Support	Neutral	State of war	State of war
Bahrain	Illegitimate	Support	Neutral	State of war	State of war
UAE	Illegitimate		Amicable Relations		
Oman	Legitimate	Neutral	Neutral	Opposed	Opposed
Qatar	Illegitimate	Support	Neutral	Unclear	Unclear
Jordan	Legitimate	Support	Amicable Relations	State of War	State of War

Certainly, Jordanian policy guided by the Jordanian Monarch King Abdullah the Second has borne fruit by keeping Jordan secure and stable in the shadow of a flammable and conflict-ridden

environment, where such policy has demonstrated the ability of Jordan to create solid ties with the conflicting parties, which has endowed it with both credibility and weight insofar as its regional role, while providing proof of the effectiveness of the Jordanian role particularly when crises erupt.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

It is clear that the Syrian crisis which broke out in 2011 and entered its seventh year has constituted existential and strategic challenges and threats in the medium and long-terms to the Jordanian State, whether at the political, economic or security levels, which has been reflected on its political positions and its diplomatic strategies in conjunction with the Gulf states, where there are no easy and simple options for Jordan which could be relied upon, for either there is an absolute support of the Syrian opposition (as some Gulf states demand) without there being absolute victory for the latter or its failure, which would plunge Jordan in a sea of hostility and confrontation with numerous parties whether within the current Syrian regime, or the new regime in case of the downfall of the Bashar regime.

Hence, Jordan adopted towards the Syrian crisis a policy of buying time- awaiting the direction of events in the diplomatic and military aspects without angering its Gulf or American allies. On the other hand, the policy of the Gulf states generally changed from time

to time depending on the changes in its military alliances in the battleground more than its political alliances based on the downfall of the regime in Syria, which has made some of the Gulf states, particularly Qatar, in the first phase of the crisis, and Saudi Arabia in the subsequent stage, believe in their ability to impose their political vision on Jordan which is reeling under an adverse economic and fiscal circumstance; for the two states which invested more than others in the Syrian conflict (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) are completely confluent in supporting any of the elements of the Syrian opposition, and adopted policies that are more resolute in Syria, whilst other states, including Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE, have lowered their tone as well as decreasing their support of the Syrian opposition, and instead have concentrated on playing a greater role in the diplomatic and humanitarian arenas, which has made Jordan draw nigh from all of these political positions and visions without being identified with one side to the exclusion of the other, or to one orientation to the exclusion of the other.

In general, and notwithstanding the fact that Jordanian Gulf relations sometimes witnessed political tepidness particularly as relates to the position vis a vis Syria, the regional indicators signify that the possibility of Jordanian Gulf relations being subject to quakes in the future is unlikely; for the looming challenges do not allow room for thinking concerning the pressing priorities represented in the fact that the Gulf states might consider Iranian expansion to be the principal area of concern, whilst Jordan considers the war on terror as its principal priority. However, this does not deny the fact of Jordanian

concern over Iranian expansion and the interest of the Gulf people in the war on terror.

In brief, notwithstanding the moral and formal success of the Jordanian State arising from organizing the 38<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit at the Dead Sea on 29 March 2017, whether in terms of technical organization or in terms of the ability to gather such a number of Arab rulers (22) with the exception of the Syrian leader, the conference, was not able to bring closer together the Arab viewpoints vis some vis the Syrian crisis which was placed as Item (2) on the Agenda after the Question of Palestine. Accordingly, the Syrian crisis was inert and a hostage to the visions, decisions and initiatives of regional and global powers: Turkey and Iran on the one hand, and the United States and Russian Federation on the other; and this means more years of war and conflict without there being any effective and active role for the Arab states including Jordan and the Gulf states.

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