

The Iranian War and the Reshaping of Geopolitical Balances in the Middle East: Implications for Jordan

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Abstract

The Middle East is currently undergoing a profound geopolitical transformation precipitated by the outbreak of the 2026 Iran War. Initiated in February 2026 with United States and Israeli strikes against Iranian leadership and military infrastructure, the conflict has rapidly escalated into a regional conflagration involving multiple state and non-state actors. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the war's impact on the regional balance of power, with a specific focus on the strategic, economic, and political implications for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Positioned at the geographic and geopolitical epicenter of the conflict, Jordan has found itself involuntarily drawn into the hostilities, facing direct missile and drone attacks, severe economic disruptions, and intensifying domestic pressures. Through an examination of military expenditures, proxy warfare dynamics, and shifting alliance structures, this research argues that the 2026 conflict is fundamentally altering the regional security architecture. For Jordan, the war has exacerbated existing security dilemmas, strained its delicate "cold peace" with Israel, and tested the limits of its strategic reliance on the United States. The findings suggest that while Jordan's defensive capabilities have proven resilient, the long-term stability of the Kingdom depends on its ability to navigate an increasingly multipolar and volatile Middle East where traditional deterrence mechanisms have largely failed.

Keywords: Iran War 2026, Middle East geopolitics, Jordan, balance of power, proxy warfare, regional security architecture, Strait of Hormuz, missile defense

1. Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of the Middle East has been defined by persistent volatility, shifting alliances, and the enduring rivalry between major regional powers. However, the events of early 2026 have precipitated a structural rupture in the regional security architecture that is without precedent in the post-Cold War era. On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched coordinated military strikes against the Islamic Republic of Iran, initiating what has become known as the 2026 Iran War (Ryan, 2026). This unprecedented direct confrontation, following years of shadow wars and proxy conflicts, has fundamentally destabilized the region, drawing in neighboring states and testing the resilience of existing security frameworks. The strikes, codenamed "Operation Epic Fury" by the United States and

"Operation Roaring Lion" by Israel, killed several senior Iranian officials including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, representing the most dramatic escalation in US-Iran relations since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

At the center of this geopolitical maelstrom lies the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Historically characterized by its strategic moderation and balancing act between competing regional forces, Jordan's geographic location has transformed it into a frontline state in the current conflict (Amugo, 2026). The airspace of the Kingdom has become a contested theater, with Iranian missiles and drones traversing its territory toward Israel, and occasionally targeting US military installations within Jordan itself. More than 200 drones and missiles have been launched at US and local targets inside Jordan since the war began, resulting in civilian injuries, infrastructure damage, and the deaths of three American service members stationed at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base. This paper seeks to analyze the broader reshaping of Middle Eastern geopolitical balances resulting from the 2026 war, while specifically interrogating the multifaceted implications for Jordanian national security, economic stability, and foreign policy.

The central thesis of this research posits that the 2026 Iran War is accelerating the transition from a US-hegemonic regional order to a more fragmented, multipolar security environment characterized by direct state-on-state violence rather than proxy engagements. For Jordan, this transition represents an existential challenge. The Kingdom's traditional strategy of relying on Western security guarantees and Gulf economic support is being severely tested as its territory becomes a target, its economy suffers catastrophic losses due to regional instability, and its domestic population grows increasingly alienated by the government's perceived alignment with US and Israeli military objectives (Singh, 2026). The significance of this research lies in its timely examination of how a small, resource-poor state navigates the collapse of the established regional order upon which its survival depends.

To explore these dynamics, this paper is structured into several key sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides the historical and geopolitical background leading to the 2026 conflict. Section 3 analyzes the shifting balance of power in the Middle East, focusing on military capabilities and the evolution of proxy warfare. Section 4 examines the direct military and security implications for Jordan. Section 5 details the severe economic consequences of the war on the Jordanian state. Section 6 explores the domestic political fallout and the strain on Jordan's foreign relations. Finally, Section 7 offers policy recommendations and concluding remarks on the future of the regional security architecture.

2. Background and Context: The Path to the 2026 War

The outbreak of the 2026 Iran War cannot be understood in isolation; it is the culmination of decades of escalating tensions, failed diplomatic initiatives, and intensifying regional competition. The roots of the current conflict trace back to the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 and the subsequent decades of animosity between Iran, the United States, and Israel (Bahgat, 2005). However, the immediate catalysts for the 2026 war are deeply embedded in the geopolitical shifts that occurred between 2023 and 2025, a period marked by the collapse of diplomatic frameworks, the intensification of proxy conflicts, and the normalization of direct military strikes against Iranian sovereign territory.

2.1 The Collapse of the JCPOA and Nuclear Ambiguity

The trajectory toward direct conflict accelerated following the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 under the first Trump administration (Katz, 2025). The JCPOA, negotiated between Iran and the P5+1 in 2015, represented the most significant diplomatic achievement in decades of US-Iran relations, placing verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear enrichment activities in exchange for sanctions relief. However, the US withdrawal and the subsequent imposition of a "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign severely damaged the Iranian economy but failed to compel Tehran to renegotiate the agreement on more restrictive terms. In response, Iran gradually reduced its compliance with the JCPOA's limitations on its nuclear program, increasing enrichment levels and expanding its stockpile of enriched uranium.

By mid-2025, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran had accumulated significant stockpiles of highly enriched uranium, prompting alarm in Washington and Jerusalem. The IAEA found Iran non-compliant with its NPT safeguards agreement for the first time since 2005, and reports emerged that Iran had stored highly enriched uranium in underground facilities that survived US bombings during the June 2025 Twelve-Day War (Nuclear Proliferation and Systemic Stability in the Middle East, 2025). The situation deteriorated further in February 2026 when Iran informed the IAEA that normal safeguards were "legally untenable and materially impracticable" due to persistent threats of military action, effectively blinding international inspectors to the status of Iran's nuclear program. This nuclear ambiguity, combined with claims by President Trump at his February 2026 State of the Union Address that Iran was developing missiles capable of striking the US, provided the primary justification for the preemptive military strikes, despite contradictions with US intelligence assessments.

2.2 The Gaza War and the Activation of the "Axis of Resistance"

The regional environment was already highly combustible due to the protracted Gaza war that began following the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel. The conflict in Gaza catalyzed Iran's "Axis of Resistance"—a network of allied state and non-state actors including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and various militia groups in Iraq and Syria (Şimşek, 2025). These groups initiated a coordinated campaign of low-intensity warfare against Israel and US assets in the region, ostensibly in solidarity with the Palestinians. The Houthis disrupted international shipping in the Red Sea, Hezbollah engaged in cross-border exchanges with Israel, and Iraqi militias launched drone and rocket attacks against US bases across the region.

The strategy of proxy warfare allowed Iran to project power and maintain pressure on its adversaries while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability and avoiding direct state-on-state conflict. As Şimşek (2025) argues, Iran's proxy war strategy offered significant strategic flexibility but was fundamentally ill-suited for large-scale offensive and defensive operations. However, the continuous attrition exacted a heavy toll on the Axis of Resistance itself. The assassination of key figures, including senior IRGC commanders in Damascus, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, and Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran during 2024, signaled Israel's increasing willingness to escalate the confrontation

beyond the proxy level (After the Patron Falls, 2026). The degradation of Hezbollah's leadership and military capabilities during the 2024 Lebanon conflict further weakened Iran's forward defense posture.

2.3 The Twelve-Day War and Its Aftermath (June 2025)

A critical precursor to the 2026 conflict was the "Twelve-Day War" in June 2025. Israel, citing imminent threats from Iran's nuclear advancements, launched a concentrated military campaign—Operation Rising Lion—against Iranian nuclear and military facilities (Nuclear Proliferation and Systemic Stability in the Middle East, 2025). The United States also participated in these strikes, marking a significant escalation in direct Western military involvement against Iranian sovereign territory. While the Twelve-Day War ended in a fragile ceasefire, it shattered the established rules of engagement and normalized the concept of direct military strikes on Iran.

The aftermath of the Twelve-Day War was characterized by diplomatic failure and escalating tensions. The UN reimposed sanctions on Iran using the "snapback" mechanism in September 2025, causing the Iranian currency to collapse and devastating the civilian economy. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent labeled the collapse of the Iranian rial as the strategy's "grand culmination." Meanwhile, negotiations between the US and Iran broke down repeatedly, with neither side willing to make substantive concessions. When the US and Israel launched "Operation Epic Fury" on February 28, 2026, it represented not a new conflict, but the violent culmination of a rapidly deteriorating regional security paradigm (Ozturk, 2026).

2.4 Jordan's Precarious Pre-War Position

Prior to the outbreak of the 2026 war, Jordan was already navigating a precarious geopolitical environment. The Kingdom's security doctrine has historically relied on a delicate balancing act: maintaining a vital strategic alliance with the United States, preserving a "cold peace" with Israel formalized in the 1994 Wadi Araba Treaty, and securing economic support from the wealthy Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (Ryan, 2018). This strategy, which Ryan (2018) terms "regime security" alignment, has allowed Jordan to punch above its weight diplomatically despite its limited economic and military resources.

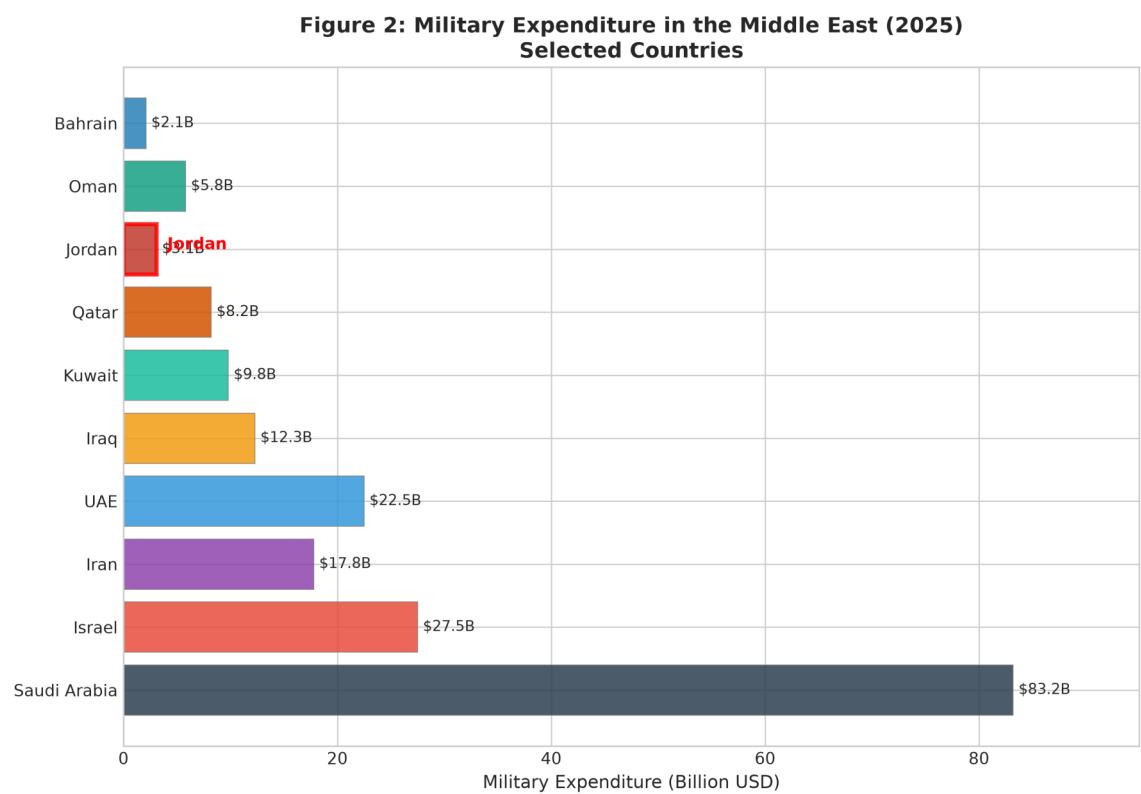
However, the 2023-2025 Gaza war placed immense strain on this strategy. The Jordanian population, which includes a large proportion of citizens of Palestinian descent, was deeply mobilized by the conflict in Gaza. The largest protests since the 2011 Arab uprisings erupted across the Kingdom, demanding the abrogation of the peace treaty with Israel and the expulsion of Western military forces. The Hashemite leadership found itself caught between overwhelming domestic pressure to sever ties with Israel and the strategic necessity of maintaining its Western alliances. Furthermore, Jordan faced continuous security threats on its northern and eastern borders, primarily from Iranian-backed militias in Syria and Iraq engaged in weapons and Captagon narcotics smuggling (The crises in the Middle East, 2025). It was within this highly volatile context that Jordan was thrust into the center of the 2026 Iran War.

3. Reshaping the Middle East Balance of Power

The 2026 Iran War is catalyzing a fundamental restructuring of the geopolitical balance of power in the Middle East. For decades, the regional security architecture was largely defined by US hegemony and the deterrence capabilities of its primary regional allies, Israel and the Gulf states, counterbalanced by Iran's asymmetric proxy network. The current conflict is demonstrating the limitations of both paradigms and forcing a recalculation of strategic assumptions across the region.

3.1 Military Expenditures and the Arms Race

The lead-up to the 2026 war was characterized by a massive regional arms race that reflected deepening insecurity and the failure of diplomatic mechanisms to manage interstate rivalries. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), military expenditure in the Middle East reached an estimated \$218 billion in 2025 (SIPRI, 2026). Analyzing these expenditures provides critical insight into the shifting balance of power and the strategic calculations of regional actors.



As illustrated in Figure 2, Saudi Arabia dominated regional defense spending in 2025 with approximately \$83.2 billion, followed by Israel at \$27.5 billion, the UAE at \$22.5 billion, and Iran at \$17.8 billion (Sandler & George, 2016; SIPRI, 2026). However, nominal spending figures do not fully capture the strategic reality. While the GCC states and Israel possess

significant qualitative advantages in advanced conventional weaponry—primarily sophisticated air forces, precision-guided munitions, and multi-layered missile defense systems procured from the United States—Iran has compensated for its conventional deficiencies through the development of a massive indigenous ballistic missile and drone program. Iran's relatively modest defense budget belies the asymmetric threat it poses through its investment in low-cost, mass-producible weapons systems capable of overwhelming expensive defensive architectures.

Jordan, with a defense budget of approximately \$3.1 billion, is dwarfed by its neighbors. This disparity underscores the Kingdom's fundamental reliance on external security guarantees and the impossibility of independently defending against the scale of threats posed by the current conflict. The war has thus exposed a critical vulnerability: Jordan's security is entirely dependent on the willingness and capacity of its allies to extend their defensive umbrella over the Kingdom.

3.2 The Evolution of Proxy Warfare to Direct Confrontation

A defining feature of the shifting balance of power is the evolution of Iran's proxy warfare strategy from an instrument of indirect power projection to a supplement within a broader conventional conflict. Prior to 2026, Iran utilized its Axis of Resistance to project power across the region while maintaining a degree of separation that prevented direct retaliation against Iranian territory (Wang et al., 2024). This model of "forward defense" allowed Tehran to dictate the tempo of regional conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and the Levant without exposing the Iranian homeland to direct military consequences.

However, the 2026 war signifies a decisive transition from proxy engagements to overt state-on-state confrontation. The US-Israeli strikes directly targeted Iranian sovereign territory, effectively collapsing the implicit rules of engagement that had previously protected Iran from direct assault (Epic fury redirected, 2026). In response, Iran has not relied solely on its proxies but has launched massive, direct military strikes from its own territory against US bases, Israel, and Gulf states. The scale of these strikes—involving hundreds of ballistic missiles and drones in coordinated salvos—represents a qualitative shift in the character of Middle Eastern warfare.

This transition does not signify the end of proxy warfare, but rather its integration into a broader conventional conflict framework. Iranian-aligned militias in Iraq and Syria have continued to play a supplementary role, launching coordinated attacks against US installations and allied nations, including Jordan (Proxy Warfare and Regional Security Dynamics, 2026). The simultaneous employment of state military forces and non-state proxy actors creates a complex, multi-domain threat environment that severely challenges traditional deterrence and defense strategies.

3.3 The Gulf States: From Hedging to Active Belligerency

The 2026 war has also forced a dramatic strategic recalibration among the Gulf Arab states. Following the 2019 attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities at Abqaiq and Khurais, which exposed the vulnerabilities of GCC critical infrastructure to drone and cruise missile attacks, states

like Saudi Arabia and the UAE pursued a policy of diplomatic de-escalation with Iran. This culminated in the China-brokered Saudi-Iranian normalization agreement in March 2023, which was widely interpreted as a signal that the Gulf states were hedging against US reliability and seeking to reduce their exposure to US-Iran tensions (The Gulf's evolving security mosaic, 2025).

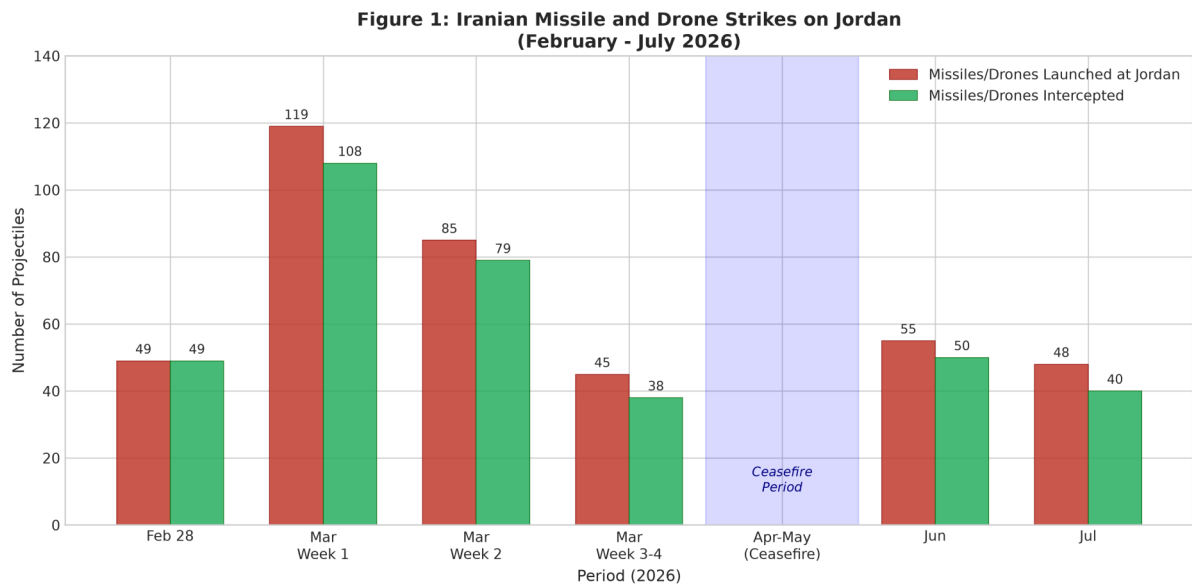
However, the outbreak of full-scale war in 2026 shattered this fragile détente. As Iranian strikes targeted US military assets hosted in the Gulf, countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait found themselves actively participating in the conflict, intercepting Iranian projectiles and, in some instances, launching retaliatory strikes against Iranian positions (Israel and the GCC member states, 2025). This forced abandonment of neutrality highlights the inescapable interconnectedness of the regional security complex; the presence of US military infrastructure inextricably links the security of the Gulf states to broader US-Iranian hostilities, regardless of their diplomatic preferences.

4. Jordan in the Crossfire: Military and Security Implications

For Jordan, the reshaping of the regional balance of power is not an abstract geopolitical concept, but an immediate and existential security crisis. Sharing borders with Israel, the occupied West Bank, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, Jordan's geography dictates its strategic vulnerability. The 2026 Iran War has transformed the Kingdom from a regional buffer state into an active theater of military operations, fundamentally challenging its declared neutrality and exposing the costs of its alliance structures.

4.1 The Airspace Battleground and Unprecedented Military Threats

The most immediate manifestation of the war for Jordan has been the systematic violation of its sovereign airspace. As Iran launched retaliatory strikes against Israel, the most direct flight path for ballistic missiles and drones traversed Jordanian territory. Unlike the April 2024 Iranian strikes on Israel, where Jordan's interception of Iranian projectiles was relatively limited in scope, the 2026 war has seen a sustained, months-long aerial campaign over and into Jordan.



As detailed in Figure 1, the intensity of the aerial conflict over Jordan has been unprecedented in the Kingdom's history. On the opening day of the war, February 28, 2026, Jordanian air defenses, operating in coordination with US and allied forces, intercepted 49 Iranian drones and missiles, including 13 ballistic missiles. During the first week of the conflict alone, the Jordanian Armed Forces reported that 119 projectiles were fired into or across their airspace, with 108 successfully intercepted. The second week saw an additional 85 missiles and drones, of which 79 were intercepted, with five drones and one missile landing inside Jordanian territory. The data reveals a consistent pattern of Iranian escalation, with strikes resuming after the April ceasefire collapsed and intensifying through June and July 2026.

The interceptions, while demonstrating the tactical effectiveness of Jordan's air defense network augmented by US Patriot and THAAD systems, resulted in significant collateral damage. Falling shrapnel and debris caused injuries to at least 29 Jordanian civilians and damaged property across the country, particularly in the capital, Amman, and the eastern governorates. A drone crash in Amman on March 4 wounded a girl and destroyed nearby homes, bringing the war directly into the civilian sphere.

4.2 The Western Basing Strategy and Jordan's Security Dilemma

Jordan's vulnerability in the 2026 war is intrinsically linked to its role in the US "Western Basing Strategy." In January 2021, Jordan and the United States signed a comprehensive defense cooperation agreement that granted US forces unimpeded access to twelve military facilities across the Kingdom, including five air bases. Prior to the war, this agreement was viewed by the Jordanian leadership as a vital security guarantee and a mechanism to ensure continued US economic and military assistance. The Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Azraq served as a key logistical hub for US C-17 airlifts, and approximately 60 US combat aircraft were stationed there as of February 2026.

However, the 2026 conflict has highlighted the severe risks associated with this strategy. Because US bases in the Gulf are geographically closer to Iran and highly vulnerable to

short-range missile attacks, the US military increasingly relied on its facilities in Jordan as safer staging grounds for operations against Iran. Consequently, Iran viewed Jordan not as a neutral party, but as an active participant facilitating hostile acts against Iranian territory. Tehran's rhetoric toward Amman has grown increasingly belligerent, with Iranian officials filing formal protests at the United Nations accusing Jordan of "facilitating hostile acts against Iranian territory."

The strikes against US assets in Jordan have been devastating. The destruction of a THAAD radar system, an MQ-9 Reaper drone, and significant damage to Black Hawk helicopters and fighter jets demonstrated that even advanced military infrastructure within Jordan was not immune to Iranian precision strikes. Most tragically, two US service members were killed in action on July 17, 2026, while defending against an Iranian missile attack on Muwaffaq Salti Air Base, with a third remaining missing and four others medically evacuated.

4.3 The Eastern Frontier: Iraqi Militia Threats

Beyond the threat of long-range ballistic missiles from Iran, Jordan faces acute security challenges on its eastern border with Iraq. The 2026 war activated Iran's network of proxy militias in Iraq, such as Saraya Awliya al-Dam, Rijal al-Bas al-Shadid, and Kataib Jund al-Karrar, which have claimed responsibility for multiple drone strikes against Jordanian territory. On March 28, reports indicated that Iran-aligned Iraqi militias carried out coordinated strikes targeting five major airbases in Jordan simultaneously.

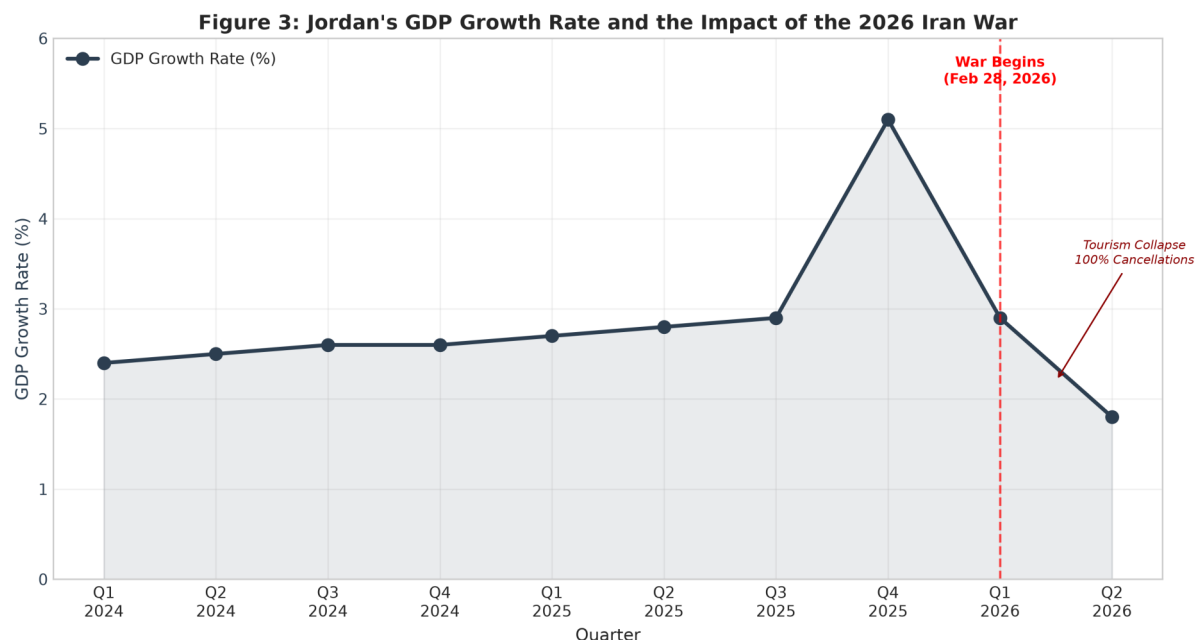
These non-state actors present a complex challenge for the Jordanian Armed Forces. Unlike state-sponsored ballistic missile launches, which can be tracked by advanced radar systems, low-flying Shahed-101 suicide drones launched from the expansive desert regions of western Iraq are difficult to detect and intercept. Furthermore, the mobilization of these militias raises fears of cross-border incursions and the potential for these groups to exploit existing smuggling networks—previously used for Captagon trafficking—to infiltrate the Kingdom, thereby threatening internal stability. Jordan has urged Iraq to take measures to halt these cross-border attacks, but Baghdad's limited control over Iranian-aligned factions has rendered such appeals largely ineffective.

5. Economic Devastation and the Cost of Conflict

The strategic and military challenges facing Jordan are compounded by the severe economic fallout of the 2026 Iran War. Prior to the conflict, the Jordanian economy, long characterized by high unemployment, substantial public debt, and limited natural resources, was showing encouraging signs of recovery. A December 2025 IMF report praised the Kingdom's "sound economic policies and reforms," which contributed to recovering growth, low inflation, and solid reserves. The outbreak of war violently reversed this positive trajectory, threatening to undo years of painful structural adjustment.

5.1 The Collapse of GDP Growth and the Tourism Catastrophe

The immediate macroeconomic impact of the war is starkly evident in the Kingdom's GDP growth figures, which tell a story of dramatic reversal.



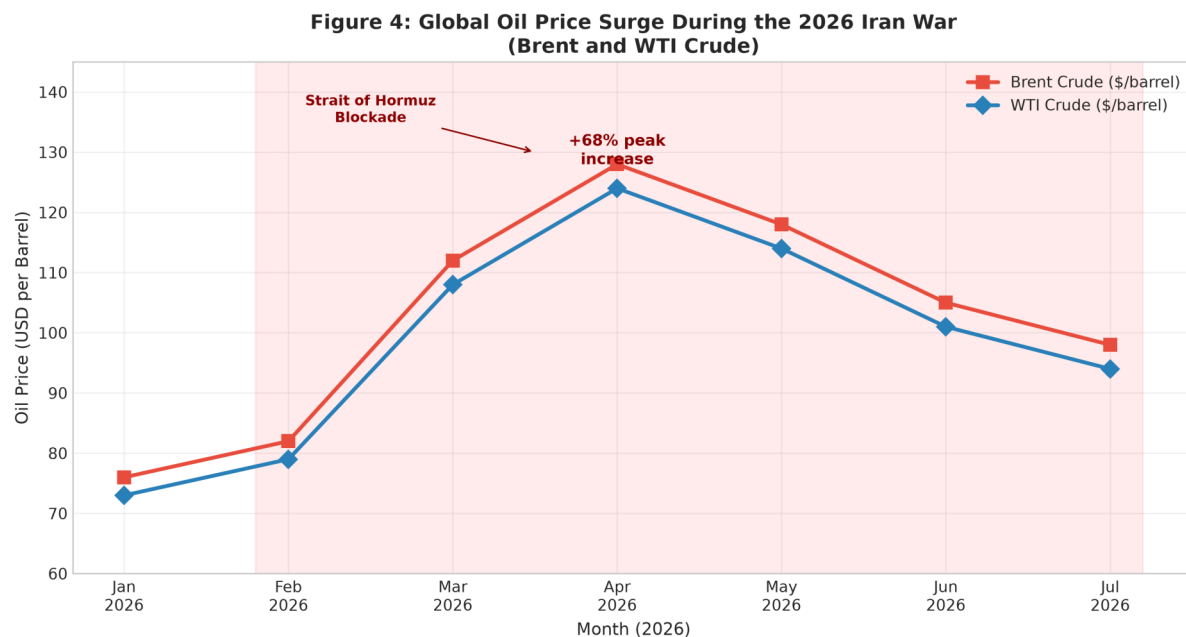
As demonstrated in Figure 3, Jordan achieved an impressive 5.1% GDP growth rate in the fourth quarter of 2025, the highest in recent memory. However, following the initiation of hostilities in late February 2026, growth plummeted to 2.9% in Q1 2026 and further deteriorated to an estimated 1.8% in Q2. This deceleration is particularly alarming given that the pre-war growth trajectory suggested Jordan was finally achieving the economic momentum necessary to address its chronic unemployment crisis and reduce its debt-to-GDP ratio.

A primary driver of this economic contraction was the total collapse of the tourism industry. Tourism historically accounts for approximately 15% of Jordan's GDP and is a vital source of foreign exchange and employment, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs directly and indirectly. The transformation of Jordanian airspace into a conflict zone and the constant threat of missile strikes led to a 100% cancellation rate for hotel bookings and tour packages in March 2026. Iconic sites such as Petra, Wadi Rum, and the Dead Sea—which attract millions of visitors annually—were effectively rendered inaccessible. The government was forced to issue a \$1 billion stimulus package specifically targeted at supporting the devastated tourism sector and increasing bank liquidity to prevent widespread bankruptcies among hotels, tour operators, and associated businesses.

5.2 Energy Insecurity and the Strait of Hormuz Crisis

Jordan's economic vulnerability is further exacerbated by its near-total reliance on imported energy. The 2026 war triggered a severe global energy crisis, primarily due to Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz beginning in late March 2026. The Strait, through which approximately 20% of global oil supply transits daily, became the focal point of Iran's

asymmetric response to US-Israeli military superiority (Geopolitical Tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, 2026).

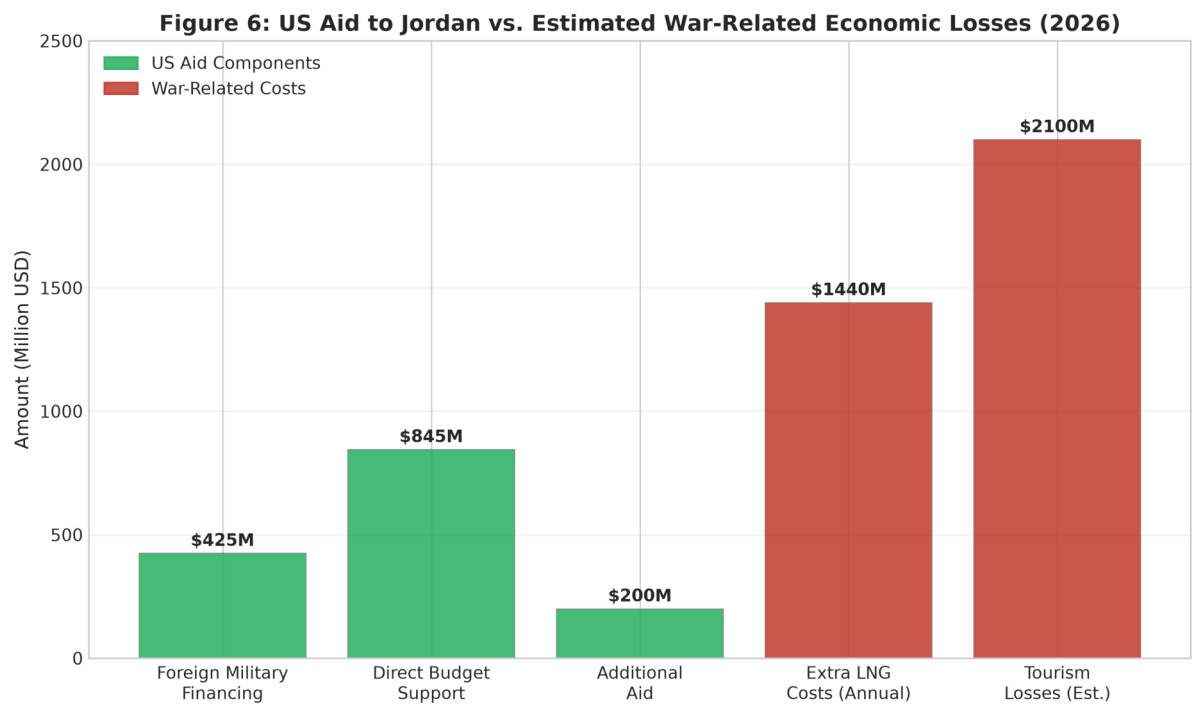


As shown in Figure 4, the disruption of maritime traffic through the world's most critical oil chokepoint caused global crude prices to skyrocket. Brent crude surged from \$82 per barrel in February to a peak of \$128 in April, representing a 68% increase. The Brookings Institution noted that oil prices were "likely to rise further as the Strait of Hormuz remains closed, and once it opens, the market will take months to normalize" (From chokepoint to crisis, 2026). For a non-oil-producing country like Jordan, this price shock translated immediately into soaring domestic inflation and a rapidly expanding import bill. To mitigate the impact on consumers, the Jordanian government increased subsidies on essential staples like bread, but was nonetheless forced to hike domestic fuel prices by 11%.

Furthermore, the war directly disrupted Jordan's natural gas supply. Prior to the conflict, Jordan imported 85% of its natural gas from Israel through a pipeline that accounted for nearly 70% of the Kingdom's electricity generation. The hostilities interrupted this supply chain, forcing Amman to rely on its Aqaba regasification terminal to import Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from the global market at an exorbitant premium. This logistical pivot incurred an estimated additional cost of \$120 million per month—or \$1.44 billion annually—placing immense strain on the national budget and highlighting the dangerous vulnerability of single-source energy dependence.

5.3 The Gap Between Foreign Aid and War Costs

Jordan's economic survival is heavily dependent on foreign assistance, primarily from the United States. In 2026, the US allocated \$425 million in Foreign Military Financing, \$845 million in direct budgetary support, and approximately \$200 million in additional aid to the Kingdom—equivalent to nearly 8% of the state's total annual budget of \$18.4 billion.



However, as Figure 6 illustrates, the generous US assistance package is dwarfed by the massive economic losses incurred due to the war. The estimated annual cost of emergency LNG imports (\$1.44 billion) and the projected losses from the collapsed tourism sector (over \$2 billion) far exceed the total US aid allocation of approximately \$1.47 billion. Consequently, the Jordanian government was forced to implement severe austerity measures in April 2026, including halting government hiring, canceling most official travel abroad, prohibiting the use of air conditioners and heating units in government facilities, and limiting the use of government vehicles. Prime Minister Jafar Hasan announced these measures as necessary sacrifices during wartime, but they have further strained the social contract between the state and its citizens.

6. Domestic Politics and the Strain on Foreign Relations

The intersection of military vulnerability and economic hardship has generated unprecedented domestic political pressure on the Hashemite regime, severely straining its traditional foreign policy alignments and raising fundamental questions about the sustainability of Jordan's strategic orientation.

6.1 The Domestic Legitimacy Crisis

The 2026 war has catalyzed widespread public anger within Jordan, building upon the already intense sentiments generated by the 2023-2025 Gaza war. The sight of the Royal Jordanian Air Force intercepting Iranian missiles bound for Israel was deeply unpopular among a populace that overwhelmingly sympathizes with the Palestinian cause and views Israel as the primary aggressor in the region. Many Jordanians perceived the interceptions not as acts of national self-defense, but as complicity in protecting a state that was

simultaneously killing Palestinian civilians in Gaza and expanding settlements in the West Bank.

The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, capitalized on this public sentiment with remarkable effectiveness. Emboldened by the crisis, the IAF organized massive demonstrations in downtown Amman on April 10, 2026—the largest since the early days of the Gaza war—demanding the abrogation of the 1994 Wadi Araba peace treaty with Israel and the expulsion of US military forces from the Kingdom. The government found itself on the defensive, struggling to articulate a narrative that justified military coordination with the US and Israel as necessary for Jordanian national security, rather than as an act of complicity in Israeli military objectives. This task was made more difficult by the fact that many government officials themselves employed confrontational rhetoric toward Israel.

The political crisis forced the government to withdraw a controversial, though economically necessary, social security reform bill from parliament, representing a significant defeat for the regime's economic modernization agenda. The war has thus dramatically narrowed the political maneuvering room for King Abdullah II, forcing a delicate balancing act between satisfying domestic public opinion and maintaining the strategic alliances essential for state survival. The banning of the Muslim Brotherhood in April 2025 and subsequent steps to weaken the IAF have proven counterproductive in the wartime environment, as the opposition has been able to position itself as the authentic voice of popular sentiment.

6.2 The Deterioration of the "Cold Peace" with Israel

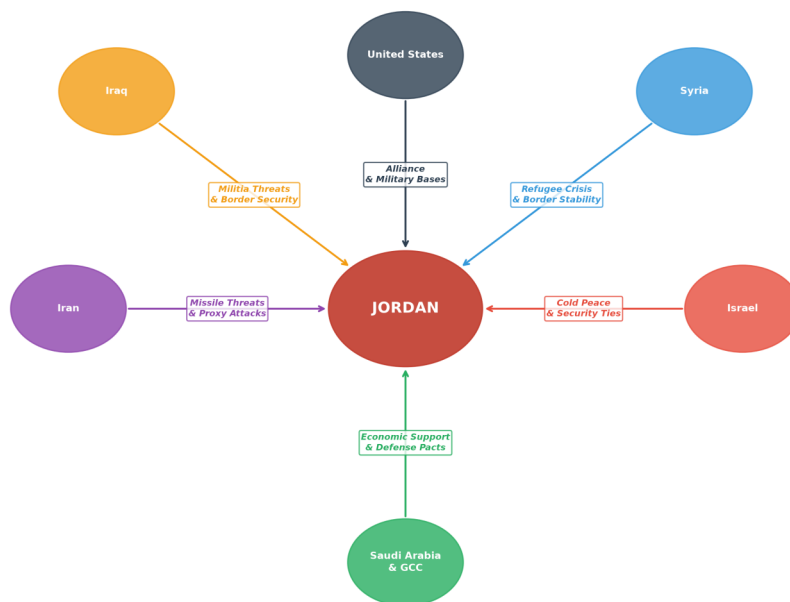
The most significant diplomatic casualty of the 2026 war for Jordan has been its relationship with Israel. While military and intelligence coordination between the two states reached unprecedented levels during the conflict—necessitated by the shared threat of Iranian missile strikes and the integration of their air defense systems—political relations have deteriorated to their lowest point since the signing of the peace treaty in 1994.

The Jordanian leadership has adopted increasingly harsh rhetoric condemning Israeli military actions in Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran, reflecting the intense domestic pressure. King Abdullah II has publicly criticized the war as serving Israeli expansionist ambitions rather than legitimate security concerns. Conversely, the Israeli government under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has viewed Jordan's diplomatic posture with deep suspicion, leading to a near-total cessation of political engagement between the two neighbors. The paradox of intense tactical military cooperation occurring alongside severe political estrangement highlights the fragility of the bilateral relationship and raises serious concerns about the long-term viability of the peace treaty in a post-war environment.

A particularly contentious issue is the renewal of the bilateral water-sharing agreement, which is critical for Jordan's water security during the summer months. The politicization of this technical issue within the broader context of deteriorating relations threatens to create a humanitarian crisis in the Kingdom, further inflaming public opinion against the peace treaty.

6.3 Reevaluating the US Alliance and Exploring Alternatives

Figure 5: Jordan's Geopolitical Position During the 2026 Iran War
(Key Actors and Relationships)



As depicted in Figure 5, Jordan is situated at the nexus of competing regional forces, each exerting distinct pressures on the Kingdom. The 2026 war has prompted a critical reevaluation of the Kingdom's absolute strategic reliance on the United States. While the US alliance remains the cornerstone of Jordanian security, the conflict has vividly demonstrated the costs associated with this partnership.

The presence of US bases transformed Jordan into an Iranian target, while US diplomatic and military support for Israel during the broader regional crisis deeply alienated the Jordanian public. Furthermore, the return of the Trump administration resurrected profound anxieties within Jordan regarding the "alternative homeland" (al-watan al-badil) concept—the fear that US and Israeli policies might seek to resolve the Palestinian issue through mass displacement into Jordanian territory. Trump's explicit calls for Egypt and Jordan to absorb the Palestinian population of Gaza sent shockwaves through the Jordanian establishment, transforming what had been a theoretical fear into an apparently imminent policy threat.

Additionally, the dismantling of USAID and the withdrawal of funding from UNRWA under the Trump administration dealt severe blows to Jordan's development infrastructure and its capacity to support Palestinian refugees. The imposition of high tariffs on Jordanian exports, in apparent disregard of the US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement, further eroded confidence in the reliability of the American partnership.

Consequently, while a complete rupture with Washington is highly improbable given Jordan's economic and military dependencies, there is growing discourse within Jordanian policy circles advocating for a diversification of alliances. Strengthening ties with the Gulf states,

particularly Saudi Arabia, and exploring deeper engagements with emerging global powers like China and European states are increasingly viewed as necessary hedging strategies in an increasingly multipolar and unpredictable Middle East. Jordan's early and strong condemnation of Iranian aggression against the GCC states, combined with King Abdullah's visits to Gulf capitals, represents a deliberate effort to strengthen these alternative partnerships.

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The 2026 Iran War represents a watershed moment in Middle Eastern geopolitics. The transition from proxy warfare to direct state-on-state confrontation has shattered the established deterrence paradigms and exposed the vulnerabilities of all regional actors. For the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the conflict has been a severe stress test, exacerbating its structural economic weaknesses, straining its domestic political consensus, and challenging the foundational premises of its foreign policy. The war has demonstrated that Jordan's geographic position, once a source of strategic leverage, has become its greatest liability in an era of long-range precision strikes and unmanned aerial warfare.

While Jordan has demonstrated remarkable resilience in defending its airspace—intercepting the vast majority of incoming projectiles—and managing the immediate economic shocks through a combination of austerity measures and international assistance, the long-term implications of the war are deeply concerning. The Kingdom remains trapped in a structural security dilemma: the alliances necessary for its survival simultaneously make it a target for regional adversaries and a focal point for domestic unrest. The war has also revealed the inadequacy of existing international frameworks to protect small states caught in the crossfire of great power and regional rivalries.

To navigate this perilous new geopolitical reality and ensure the stability of the Jordanian state, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

First, the United States must recognize that the costs borne by Jordan due to its role in the Western Basing Strategy far exceed current aid levels. Washington should substantially increase direct budgetary support to offset the devastating economic impacts of the war, particularly regarding emergency energy procurement and the collapse of the tourism sector. Furthermore, the US must prioritize the rapid replacement and upgrading of air defense systems damaged during the conflict to ensure Jordan's continued capability to protect its airspace and civilian population.

Second, the deterioration of political ties between Amman and Jerusalem poses a severe threat to regional stability. The United States and European partners must actively mediate to de-escalate bilateral tensions, focusing initially on practical, non-political issues such as the renewal of vital water-sharing agreements, to prevent a complete collapse of the 1994 peace treaty. The loss of the Jordan-Israel peace treaty would represent a catastrophic setback for regional stability and US strategic interests.

Third, to reduce Jordan's vulnerability to future supply chain disruptions, the Kingdom must be integrated into post-war regional economic frameworks. This includes accelerating projects related to energy diversification, such as electrical grid interconnections with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, development of domestic renewable energy capacity, and the establishment of strategic fuel reserves to reduce reliance on single-source energy imports.

Fourth, while maintaining the vital US alliance, Jordan should deepen its security cooperation with the GCC states. Formalizing regional air defense coordination mechanisms with Saudi Arabia and the UAE can provide an additional layer of security and reduce the political stigma associated with relying solely on Western military architecture. The war has demonstrated that collective regional defense is both necessary and achievable.

The 2026 Iran War has unequivocally demonstrated that the security of the Middle East is indivisible. The stability of Jordan is not merely a localized concern, but a critical linchpin for the broader regional order. As the geopolitical balances continue to shift toward multipolarity and direct confrontation, ensuring the resilience of the Hashemite Kingdom must remain a paramount priority for the international community. The alternative—the destabilization of one of the region's last remaining moderate, pro-Western states—would have consequences far beyond Jordan's borders.

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