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Jordan's Double Game with Israel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Despite 25 years of formal peace, many in Jordan regard Israel as an illicit enemy state. The Jordanian government plays a double game: its public hostility toward Israel enables it to preserve its popularity while, behind the scenes, it maintains close ties with Israel.

In an unusual and particularly outrageous declaration, Jordanian MP Tarek Khoury recently called on Jordanians to blow up pipelines that are supposed to bring natural gas to Jordan from Israel. Khoury, who is from the Christian community, stated early in July: "I want to propose something to all the members of parliament: to sign an honor roll. Each one is free to sacrifice his life and his children's lives in order to blow up any [Israeli] gas pipeline that passes through Jordanian territory. All of us will be martyrs. We will sign this honor roll to prevent this gas pipeline from passing through one centimeter of Jordanian land."

Many in Jordan oppose the gas deal with Israel, but this is taking things to another level.

Talks on the deal began back in 2011, and it was signed in 2016 with American mediation after several deferrals. The deal will allow the transfer of natural gas from Israel's Leviathan gas field to the Jordanian electric company, and will amount to \$10 billion over a period of 15 years. The gas supply is supposed to begin early in 2020.

The deal has been consistently opposed by many members of Jordan's parliament and not inconsiderable parts of its population. Numerous demonstrations have demanded that it be canceled on the grounds that Jordan should not make deals with the "Zionist enemy."

Many Jordanians are angered by the fact that the agreement was written in English, which violates Jordanian law, and that the only currencies of which it speaks are the

shekel and the dollar, not the Jordanian dinar. In December 2014, most MPs voted on a draft resolution urging the government to cancel the deal.

Recently, the spokesman of the lower house of parliament asserted that all sectors of Jordanian society and all MPs oppose the agreement signed with the “Zionist entity” and have demanded that it be canceled at any price. Some MPs have even called for the government to be sued for having signed the agreement without obtaining the parliament’s approval.

Despite the peace treaty and two-and-a-half decades of diplomatic relations, many in Jordan continue to regard Israel as an illicit enemy state. The government is playing a double game: its public hostility toward Israel enables it to preserve its popularity while, behind the scenes, it maintains good relations with Israel. These covert relations are intended among other things to please the Trump administration and to ensure the supply of water and other resources.

Thus, despite its fiery rhetoric, the Jordanian government behaves rationally. It is in no hurry to make declarations that would lead to the canceling of the deal, which is vital to the kingdom. The contract stipulates that canceling would cost the Hashemite Kingdom a fine of \$1.5 billion.

King Abdullah has yet to make a statement on the issue. At the end of April the Jordanian media reported that the monarch had been given a report analyzing the gas deal with Israel and the ramifications of continuing or freezing it.

Israeli-Jordanian relations are at a sensitive stage, not only because of the gas deal but also in light of Jordan’s decision on October 28, 2018, to end the leasing of the “Island of Peace” and the Tzofar enclave to Israel. It is not clear whether, in about a year from that date, Jordan will apply its full sovereignty to those locations; it may be that negotiations are being held to solve the problem. It could even be that one depends upon the other.

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