

**IRANIAN-SAUDI TENSION IN GULF, AND NOW IN JORDAN, PART
OF INCREASINGLY UNSTABLE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION**

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2012



ENGULFED BY FEAR

Mordechai Kedar

[Mordechai Kedar](#), May 26, 2012

The Persian Gulf suffers from severe geo-political disproportionality: on its eastern shore lies one large state, Iran, which operates methodically and consistently to implement its agenda, the goal of which is regional, if not wider, hegemony; while on its western shore lie no less than twelve Arab states: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the seven states of the United Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharqah, and Umm al-Quwain. Each state has its own story: a family that dominates the leadership, a unique character, its own internal problems, and its own individual agenda, which differs from state to state. As long as Iraq was under the control of Saddam, it was a counterweight to Iran, and the states of the Gulf took shelter in the shadow of Iraq. They also paid protection money to Iraq in the form of partial funding of the Iraqi military efforts during the years of the war against Iran between 1980 and 1988. Since their establishment, the ultimate goal of the Gulf states was to survive among the giants, Iraq and Iran, and the Emirates kept their distance from Saudi Arabia. Recently the Iranian titan took control of the Iraqi titan.

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The states of the Arabian Peninsula have been trying for years to create a mechanism that would result in a united agenda, mainly from a security point of view, and in light of the war between Iran and Iraq, they created the "Gulf Cooperation Council" (GCC) in May 1981. The main achievement of this Council was the establishment of a military force by the name of the "Peninsula Shield Force", whose role is to defend its members from external attack. However, the Force was too weak and therefore unable to rescue Kuwait in 1990 from the Iraqi invasion. The most successful action of the Force was in March of 2011, when they became involved in the internal struggle in Bahrain to stabilize the minority Arab-Sunni rule over the majority Persian-Shi'ite population, which was rebelling against the regime under the influence of the "Arab Spring" and with the encouragement of Iran.

Since the regime of Saddam was overthrown in the year 2003, and since Iran has succeeded during the last year to bring Iraq into its sphere of influence, the Gulf states feel that the Iranian steamroller is approaching nearer and nearer to them, and the guillotine of the Ayatollahs is threatening the connection between the heads and shoulders of the sheikhs, princes and kings who live in the Arabian Peninsula. The states of the Peninsula feel that they are increasingly dependent on the United States and the West to guard their independence and their political

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and economic maneuverability, but the West seems tired and exhausted now, as a result of their failure in Iraq and Afghanistan, and its leadership - especially the current resident in the White House, who is heavily influenced by the approaching elections - lacks a backbone and has no ability to deter the Iranians and stop them from galloping towards regional hegemony that will include the whole Arabian peninsula. The Gulf states know that if Iran invades Kuwait and conquers it, as Saddam did in August of 1990, the world will not send its armies to rescue Kuwait again, but will sacrifice it on the Iranian altar in hopes that the Ayatollahs will be satisfied with that. And any other country can expect the same treatment.

The inherent split among the states of the Arabian Peninsula has been exacerbated recently by the internal problems that are tearing Yemen from within: the conflict between the North and the South awakens the desire among the tribes of South Yemen to renew the independence that they lost 22 years ago, in the never-ending war between the Sana'a regime and the Hawthi's in the district of Sa'da in the North and the activities of Al-Qaeda (and especially egregious was the terror attack that caused about a hundred fatalities among the soldiers of the army) against the central regime, weakening the domestic front of this state and threatening its integrity.

As a result, the geo-political situation in the Gulf in the recent period is that of total inequality: On one side is one unified state with a clear goal, possessing great power and a willingness to use it and the proven ability to do anything it wants without regard to the international community; and on the other side are 13 states including Yemen, with various competing concerns, and with complex internal conflicts. And in some of the states, large Shi'ite minorities exist which are an Iranian-Shiite "Trojan Horse" within Arab-Sunni states. And added to this already problematic situation is the history, which is no less complex and problematic: The Iranian takeover of three islands that belong to the Emirates which occurred back in the days of the Shah, but continues to be a focus of tension; the visit of Ahmadinejad to one of these islands about two months ago as a sign of Iranian sovereignty over them; Iranian naval maneuvers to close off the Strait of Hormuz; Iranian talk about the historical connection between Iran and Bahrain, which has a Persian-Shi'ite majority and Iranian talk about the obligation of Bahrain to return to the Iranian bosom; Iranian complaints to Saudi Arabia about how it relates to its Shi'ite minority that resides in the area of the oil fields; and the provocative behavior of Iranians who make the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, arousing sectarian tension among the Sunnis.

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All of these factors together, and especially the lack of trust that the West and the United States will support them in their hour of need, has created among the leaders of the Gulf states great fear of the Iranian giant that is threatening to take them over, and today they are dominated by the feeling that there is no choice for them except to change the geo-political equation vis a vis Iran. To do this they must create common ground for their political and security policies, because the divisiveness that prevails in the Arabian Peninsula weakens them. Saudi Arabia, which sees itself - and very justifiably - as the main target of the Iranians, is leading this process. The Saudis know well that the main goal of the Iranians in the Arabian Peninsula, after or even before the oil, is the two holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina. Ever since the Ibn Saud family took over the Hijaz 90 years ago, the king boasts that he is "the Custodian of the Two Holy Places" and uses this as the basis of Islamic legitimization for his rule. A Shi'ite takeover of the Peninsula, which was stolen by the Sunnis, will turn back the wheel of history to the middle of the Seventh century, to the days of the Caliphate of Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth caliph, and even now the Shi'ites dream of returning Islamic hegemony to his family. The Saudis view Shi'ism as a kind of heresy.

The Saudi push for some kind of unity in the Peninsula was declared in January 2012, when the emergency summit of the Gulf states met to discuss the Iranian threat in light of the developments of the "Arab Spring" and their ramifications for the stability of the Gulf states. In this summit, which met in Riyadh, the capital of

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Saudi Arabia, the Saudi King Abdullah spoke to the attendees with this language — (my comments are in parenthesis, M.K.): "We are meeting in the shadow of a challenge that demands that we wake up, and at a time when we must unify our forces and our voices." The king declared to his listeners that there are threats to the security and stability of the Gulf; and despite the fact that he did not mention the source of the threats, there was no doubt to whom he was referring. He called to the leaders, his neighbors, "to rise (above the disputes) to the necessary level of responsibility that is required of them, and since the attendees were all part of the (Islamic) nation they must support their brothers (the Syrians) in order to rescue them from the bloodshed (of the Syrian regime, which is supported by Iran)".

King Abdullah added: "Our accumulated history and experience have taught us not to be satisfied with just talking about our situation and leaving it at that, because he who acts in this way will find himself at the end of the line and will be lost. And since this is not acceptable for any of us, I request from you to progress from this phase of cooperation to the phase of unification as one entity; this will remove the evil and bring goodness." There is no expression more severe than these religiously charged words in diplomatic Arabic language that can be used in order to convey a message about Iran. The fact that the name of Iran was not explicitly mentioned does not detract from the strength of the words. It must be assumed that behind the scenes, sharper, less diplomatic and more explicit expressions toward Iran were heard.

The anxiety of the Gulf states was exacerbated with the provocative visit of the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in April of this year, to the island of Abu Musa, one of three islands that belong to the United Arab Emirates according to the claim of the UAE, and that Iran took over in the days of the Shah, in 1971. This island is located in the Strait of Hormuz, opposite the shore of Abu Dhabi, and the military base that Iran established on it could serve the Iranian forces if they try to block the Strait. The visit triggered a wave of severe verbal responses by the UAE, and Iran responded with a wave of foul statements against the Gulf States. This response is important because it created a very bad atmosphere and high tension between the two sides of the Gulf. Here it is worthwhile to mention that the Arabs call the Gulf "The Arabian Gulf", while the Iranians insist on calling it "the "Persian Gulf", and whenever an Arab leader says "Arabian Gulf", the Iranians become upset and call in the ambassador for a scolding.

Hassan Sheikh al-Islam, the adviser for International Affairs to the head of "Majlis

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al-Shura" the Iranian parliament, said that "declarations by the leaders of the Emirates regarding the islands in the Persian(!) Gulf are part of an old plot that is supported by the leaders of Britain (which was the governor of the Gulf until it left during the process of the sixties) and the Zionist entity." Accusing the states of the Gulf of Zionism is meant to shut the mouths of Iran's detractors. (It's worthy of note that also Hitler in his day, would accuse his detractors of cooperation with the Jews.) The islands, according to Sheikh al-Islam, are an inseparable part of the land of Iran, so the president's visit to the island is a natural thing. He also accused Saudi Arabia of forgetting the two Saudi islands, Sanafir and Tiran, located at the mouth of the Gulf of Eilat, which Israel conquered in 1967 in the Six Day War, and still controls, according to him, because Sadat did not demand to get them back since they belong to Saudi Arabia. He claims that the Saudis are quiet so that they will not aggravate their friends in Tel Aviv, just as they and their friends in the Emirates are quiet about the Jewish occupation of Judea and Samaria that belong to the Palestinians, the occupation of the Golan Heights that belongs to Syria, and the Israeli takeover of Sheba Farms that belongs to Lebanon.

The Iranian spokesman accused "Abu Mut'ab" (the use of the nickname of Abdullah, King of Saudi Arabia is intended to express disrespect) of supporting the Syrian rebels, and that his Sheikhs issue fatwas (religious rulings) that obligate the Muslims to go to jihad against the Syrian rulers in order to establish a Salafi and Wahhabi regime in Syria similar to that of Saudi Arabia. Everyone knows that the enemy of the Islamic world is Israel, so why do the Gulf media deal with subtle things like the visit of Ahmadinejad to Abu Musa? The Gulf media should focus on Israel! These words against the media in the Gulf are aimed mainly at the al-Jazeera channel, which broadcasts from Qatar, and caused - in the opinion of the regime in Syria and Iran and the leaders of Hizbullah in Lebanon - the wave of Arab violence called the "Arab Spring" that was intended to improve the situation of the Zionist Entity by means of overthrowing Arab rulers.

The Iranian spokesman finished his words with a general declaration that Iran will not fall into the trap of regional bickering with the Arabs and saves all of its strength for coping with the real enemy, the Zionist enemy. The goal behind this declaration is to relax, or rather pacify, the Emirates in the Gulf, so that there will be no noise when Iran takes them over. However, their leaders know the deceptive ways of the Iranians, and are well aware of the fact that talk of the Zionist entity is precisely the proof that Iran sees the states of the Gulf as the first target for its tentacles.

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In the middle of the month of May, about one week before this writing, it became known that the head of the "Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies" in Jeddah, General Dr. Anwar 'Ishqi, said that the council of the summit of the Gulf states that was supposed to meet in Riyadh would decide on "a certain type of unity between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain". The meaning of such a declaration is that Saudi Arabia is already in secret negotiations with the Bahraini royal house, with the goal of declaring a union to fend off the Iranian attempts to take over the island, and to give legitimacy to the Saudi military involvement against the Persian-Shi'ite majority of the citizens of Bahrain. A union of this sort will turn such involvement into an "internal matter", so that other states will have nothing to say about it. These rumors have worried many people, in Bahrain as well as outside of it. For the Bahraini Shi'ite opposition, a union such as this would be the kiss of death; for Iran it might push off the day in which it will again control Bahrain, but the other ruling families in the Gulf states don't want to give up their independence and their wealth to become an organ in the aged Saudi political body.

All of the observers were reminded of the saying of King Abdallah from last January quoted above, and understood that Saudi Arabia and Bahrain indeed have passed from a stage of cooperation to the stage of becoming one entity in a way that will be acceptable for all sides. They are reminded that in the first Council of the Summit, a decision was taken to establish a think tank that would include three representatives from every state and would deal with the way in which the Gulf states can create some kind of union among them. The schedule was fairly tight: In February, names of participants were supposed to have been submitted, and in March - just one month afterward - the team was supposed to have served its recommendations.

When they heard about the idea of a union between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the Iranians were beside themselves with rage. The official news agency "Fars" called the idea "an evil Saudi-Gulf step intended to give legitimacy to the occupation of Bahrain", and the Iranian spokesman said in an interview on BBC that "if Bahrain unites with any other state, it must unite again with Iran, not with Saudi Arabia".

It could be that the declaration of 'Ishqi was intended to be a "trial balloon" to see what the reaction would be, and they would decide what action to take afterward, but it could also be that it was intended to prepare public opinion in the Gulf states for the time when they must accept the hegemony of the Saudi "big brother" so that it can rescue them from the "neighboring giant" of Iran. In many

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Gulf states there are significant Shi'ite minorities, some of which speak Persian, and the leaders of these states are well acquainted with the Iranian attempts to arouse these minorities to rebellion against the Sunni regimes such as that in Bahrain.

They watch with great concern how the balance of power is changing to their detriment globally, while China and Russia paralyze the West and enable Iran to race forward with its nuclear military plans. Their fear is increased when the head of the International Atomic Energy Association returns this week with an "agreement" that might be no more meaningful than the 2012 version of the "Munich Agreement", which Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Great Britain, brought in 1938, declaring "peace in our time" which ended a year after that in the bloodshed that enveloped Europe as well as the rest of the world.

The leaders of the Gulf do not believe even one word that comes out of the Iranians' mouths, and they fear that the West may again fall into the trap of deception that Sa'eed Jalili laid in Baghdad. Western naiveté - in their opinion - will ultimately cause the states of the Gulf to fall at the feet of the Iranians and therefore they are trying now to find a way to create a union with Saudi Arabia. Bahrain is the weak link in the chain formed by the states of the Gulf, and therefore the union will begin with it. And the more that time passes and the further the West falls into the Iranian trap, the more the states of the Gulf will be pushed by their fear into the warm bosom of the Saudi family.

Dr. Mordechai Kedar, a member of the CIJR's International Board, is an Israeli scholar of Arabic and Islam, a lecturer at Bar-Ilan University and the director of the Center for the Study of the Middle East and Islam, Bar Ilan University, Israel.

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MORE TROUBLE IN JORDAN

Mudar Zahran

[Gatestone Institute](#), November 23, 2012

Last week, protests broke out in Jordan after a government decision to raise fuel prices. While protests have been taking place in Jordan for almost two years now, for the first time there is major involvement from Jordan's Palestinians, with open calls for toppling the regime. With the future of Jordan's King Abdullah in jeopardy, so is regional stability as well as Jordan's peace with Israel. Pro-Western forces have critical options to consider.

The protesters, last week, started openly to call for the king to step down. The Independent noted that previously the protests had been "peaceful and rarely targeted King Abdullah II himself," and reported that this time crowds "chanted slogans against the king and threw stones at riot police as they protested in several cities."

Al Jazeera, as well, reported that protests have been taking place "across the width and the length of the country," with "most chanting for toppling the regime." Several of the king's photographs - regularly displayed in public places in Jordan - were set on fire.

What came as a surprise in the recent protests, according to Al Jazeera, is that Palestinian refugee camps have been also participating to the fullest. These protests apparently broke out in the Al-Hussein refugee camp, close to Jordan's capital, Amman. Protesters were seen calling for toppling the regime.

In another protest, Al-Hussein refugee camp protesters chanted: "Our god, may

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you take away our oppressor. Our country Jordan has existed before the Arab Revolution," referring to the revolt against the Turks by which Jordan's king's great grandfather established the Hashemite kingdom.. Al-Hussein refugee camp protesters eventually marched into lively Douar Firas area near central Amman, where they were attacked by the fearsome Jordanian gendarmerie.

The gendarmerie officers were even harsher in the Al-Baqaa refugee camp, Jordan's largest, where protests broke out for the first time, and slogans targeted the king with demands that he step down. Protesters reportedly burned tires, blocking the highway which borders the camp and connects Amman to Northern Jordan.

The Jordanian news website Ammon published a video showing an al-Baqaa refugee camp leader calling for "calm" within camps in Jordan, while admitting that the refugee camp's leaders, usually favored by the regime over the Palestinian public, were not able to form a public committee to reach out to protesting youths. The Palestinian-dominated Jabal Al-Nuzha camp has also been the site of regular protests, with demonstrators also calling for toppling the king.

Other Palestinian-dominated areas are witnessing first-time protests as well, including Al-Ashrafiah, the Hiteen refugee camp and the broader East Amman.

It is not the Palestinians alone who are protesting against the king. "East Bankers" in Northern Jordan had generally kept away from the protest movements until last week, when the residents of Irbid, the biggest city in Northern Jordan, started calling for toppling the regime.

Other major protests have been taking place in several parts of the country. Tensions ran high in the southern city of Kerak, an East Banker-dominated city. A known opposition leader in Kerak, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said

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he was expecting serious escalation from the regime, and alleged that Jordanian police were cracking down on protesters and arresting their leaders. His claim was consistent with footage that appeared on YouTube, exhibiting parts of the unrest. He also claimed that southern Jordanians "have made up their minds, they will not tolerate the king any longer ...it is too late for him to make any reforms."

The Muslim Brotherhood too organized a protest, in the city of Rusifay, east of Amman. Their demonstration, critical of Abdullah's Prime Minister, Al-Nosuor, but with no criticism of the king or calls for toppling his regime, simply demanded that fuel prices be reduced.

On November 18, the popular Jordanian news website, Al-Sawt, published an article entitled: "Will the Muslim Brotherhood get the price for its realism and positivity during the fuel-prices protest?" In the article, editor in chief, Tarek Dilawani (also a seasoned journalist for the Jordanian daily, Ad-Dustor), claims that the Jordanian regime had "an arrangement with the Muslim Brotherhood not to surf the tide of the protests, and to keep their demands fixed on peaceful reform of the regime."

Nonetheless, the supposed arrangement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hashemite regime has not worked. It has not stopped protests by either Palestinians or East Bankers. As The Independent recently wrote: "The protesters...were led by activists that included the secular Hirak Shebabi youth movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, and various nationalist and left-wing groups." It is therefore possible that the Muslim Brotherhood is only a part of the opposition, and not "the opposition."

On 20 November, the Muslim Brotherhood-formed National Reform Council held a public conference attended by the Brotherhood's most senior Jordanian leaders. In the conference, Zaki Bani Rushied, the head of the Brotherhood's political party, the Jordanian Islamic Action Front Party, addressed the media: "The people of

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**Jordan have chosen to reform the regime; people can choose to topple the regime—
or reform it, and here in Jordan we have chosen to reform the regime."**

The Muslim Brotherhood does not seem to want the regime to fall, but rather to change in a manner that gives them control over the government as occurred in Morocco, where King Mohammed VI appointed Islamists to form the government. Further, the Muslim Brotherhood may not be confident that, if the regime falls, it can dominate future elections. The current protests have shown that, contrary to what it has always claimed, the Muslim Brotherhood does not have full control of the Jordanian opposition. Its members therefore would apparently prefer King Abdullah to hand them control over the government.

The current situation in Jordan raises concerns for pro-Western forces, including Israel, and rightfully so. With all its shortcomings, the Hashemite regime has kept Israel's longest border worry-free for the last forty years. If the king falls, will the future regime in Jordan keep the peace treaty with Israel, and the borders calm?

While the protests show that the Muslim Brotherhood does not have full control over the Jordanian opposition, if the King falls, the Muslim Brotherhood will be the only group that is financed and organized enough to win any future elections. Even if the Brotherhood does not win a landslide victory, it will be the group most able to influence Jordanian politics, and which has connections with Iraq and Iran - both anti-Israel and anti-West - thereby forming a major bloc of fundamentalism and terrorism.

Those interested in sustaining peace between Israel and Jordan, as well as global forces keen for peace in the Middle East, have the option of either supporting the King or supporting secular opposition forces in Jordan who might come to power should the king fall.

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In a recent article, Jonathan Schanzer, vice president for research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, opines there may still be time to help the King of Jordan, by pushing him "to enact meaningful reforms," "ensuring that international donor funds continue to flow," and "providing security guarantees that he [the king] will not go the way of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak." These might be the few steps necessary to keep the king in his place; still, these steps might be unlikely to take place now under the current US administration, which, perhaps inadvertently, at worst assisted the Islamists in taking over Egypt, and at best did nothing to offer the Egyptians a pro-democratic alternative.

Those interested in keeping Jordan calm, peaceful, and out of the hands of Islamists should either support the king significantly, or find a quiet plan B to support the secular opposition in Jordan. As the active opposition figure Kamal Khoury, a Palestinian Christian, said, "The seculars in Jordan are strong in their numbers and following, they just need financial and media support to dominate the arena." Dr. Khalid Kassimah, an East Banker opposition member residing in exile, stated: "The non-Islamist Jordanian opposition is no more in disarray than the Syrian secular opposition once was; minimal Western support might work wonders here; and I would not be surprised if a Jordanian opposition council is to be established in exile just as was the case in Syria."

Raed Khammash, an East Banker and well-known anti-Hashemite opposition member, active against the regime on social media networks, said, "I believe the opposition's success lies within the refugee camps, as they make up the majority of the population. Whoever cares for Jordan should establish contact with their leaders".

It seems the situation in Jordan is moving towards change at a faster pace than before. There ought, therefore, to be some serious effort to establish contact with, and examine the potential of future support for, the secular opposition's heads within the refugee camps, the Hirak Shababi (Youth Movement) and seculars within the East Bankers' opposition.

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On Topic

[Has the US Administration Decided to Get Rid of Jordan's King Abdullah?: Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, November 20, 2012](#)—Unless the US clarifies its position regarding King Abdullah and reiterates its full backing for his regime, the Muslim fundamentalists are likely to step up their efforts to create anarchy and lawlessness in the kingdom.

[The Trouble With Jordan: Joseph Hammond, The European Magazine, Dec. 10, 2012](#)—In recent weeks Jordan has seen its most dramatic protests since the start of the Arab Spring. Indeed, protests have flared in regions outside the capital, traditionally known for their loyalty to the regime. Some protesters have directly called for the removal of King Abdullah II and the Hashemite dynasty which has ruled the country since independence in 1946.

[What's the Deal with Qatar?: Greg Scoble, Real Clear World, December 10, 2012](#)—There's one thing the revolt against Libya's Gaddafi and the revolt against Syria's Assad have in common: weapons have been provisioned to Islamic extremists and al-Qaeda syndicates by the government of Qatar.

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**IRANIAN-SAUDI TENSION IN GULF, AND NOW IN JORDAN, PART
OF INCREASINGLY UNSTABLE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION**

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