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

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### 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....

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. 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 [Hussein] was overthrown in 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 and economic manoeuvrability, 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...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 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...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.

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.

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 Saudi Arabia, the Saudi King Abdullah spoke to the attendees (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; ... 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)"....

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...

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

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 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.

[The gulf states] 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....

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.

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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....

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 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....

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 he was expecting serious escalation from the regime, and alleged that Jordanian police were cracking down on protesters and arresting their leaders...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."...

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....

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.

**Qatar's Takeover of Europe:** Giulio Meotti, *Front Page Magazine*, November 14, 2012—A hateful wind emanating from the small Islamic emirate is now blowing toward Europe, a wind accompanied by an ocean of poisonous, oily, bloody money – all coming from the peninsula in the Persian Gulf which today is the world's richest country.

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