

ANALYSIS: Why King Abdullah II Nixed Parts of Jordan-Israel Peace Deal



On Sunday, King Abdullah II dropped a bombshell when he announced that Jordan would not renew parts of the 24-year-old peace agreement with Israel.

In a first statement the King said he had informed Israel “that we are putting an end to the application of the peace treaty annexes regarding Baqura and Ghumar.”

He was referring to two parcels of Jordanian land in north and south Israel which were leased for a period of 25 years by Jerusalem under the peace treaty signed in November 1994 by Abdullah’s father, King Hussein, and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, whose assassination was commemorated the same day Abdullah made his announcement.

Abdullah II said he would not renew a lease agreement of the two parcels of land in the Arava desert north of Eilat and the Jordan Valley close to the Sea of Galilee because of “regional circumstances,” and vowed to protect “the interests” of “Jordan and the Jordanians.”

The decision took Israel by surprise despite the fact that relations between the two countries were already deteriorating since July 2017, when Ziv Moyal, an Israeli security guard, killed two Jordanians in the compound of Israel’s embassy in Amman.

One of the Jordanians tried to stab Moyal, who said he clearly acted in self-defense, but the Jordanian government nevertheless wanted to try him for murder.

The incident triggered a diplomatic standoff which only ended after Jordan received an official Israeli ‘memorandum’ in which the government in Jerusalem apologized for the death of the two Jordanians as well as for the death of a Jordanian judge who was killed in another incident in 2014.

In recent months, King Abdullah II faced increasing pressure to cancel the whole peace agreement with Israel over the country's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs and after the United States recognized Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem and relocated the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Israel's capital.

Several mass demonstrations, the latest last Saturday, were held in Jordanian cities during which protesters demanded the King would "reassert Jordanian sovereignty" over the two leased parcels of land.

About 80 Jordanian lawmakers later joined the popular protest and signed a letter urging Abdullah II to cancel the peace agreement with Israel.

There are several other reasons King Abdullah decided to cancel a part of the peace agreement with Israel.

First of all, the protests in Jordan are not about Israel but about the dire economic situation in the country and about the King himself who is accused of being corrupt and addicted to gambling.

During the mass demonstration in Amman on Saturday demonstrators chanted slogans such as "No loyalty to anyone but Allah and the corrupt (king) must leave" and "we no longer waste time; Abdullah is the only one to blame."

Video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUTM3Sjsfoo>

Earlier this year Jordanian protesters took the streets to demonstrate against rising prices and a proposed hike in income tax which were mandated by the International Monetary Fund as part of austerity measures.

The demonstrations, which were instigated by the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, led to cosmetic changes in the Jordanian government but not to a significant improvement in the economic situation.

Secondly, King Abdullah II is currently adjusting Jordan's policies vis a vis Turkey and Syria where dictator Bashar al-Assad has regained control over more than two thirds of the country including the Jordanian border region.

The King is trying to mend ties with Assad and earlier this month reopened the Nassib border crossing on the Syrian border despite opposition by the United States and Israel.

The Jordanian government has a vested interest in the return of Syrian refugees who have aggravated the already dire economic situation in the country and will soon welcome a high-level Syrian delegation headed by Prime minister Walid Moallem to discuss the refugee problem and the changing regional situation.

At the same time, Abdullah II is talking with the Turkish government about a change in the routing of Turkish exports to Jordan and the Arab Gulf states.

These exports are currently routed via the Israeli port of Haifa. Abdullah II, however, wants Turkey to use the land route via Syria again and dispatched his Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz to Ankara to achieve this goal in talks with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

By not extending the lease agreement regarding the two Israeli enclaves in Jordan Abdullah II is signaling he will sacrifice good relations with Israel on the altar of his new alignment with Turkey and Syria.

At the same time, he knows that if his regime wants to survive he needs to appease the Islamist hardliners in Jordan who are increasingly targeting the monarch's handling of Jordan's multiple problems.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has now vowed he will push for negotiations with Abdullah II in order to reinstate the lease agreement.

In light of the "regional circumstances" the Jordanian King was referring to chances are slim, however, the Israeli government will succeed to save the two important agricultural areas.

Source: <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/Default.aspx?tabid=178&nid=35089>

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