

Recommendations for Improving Israel-Jordan Relations

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Israel and Jordan have recently reached understandings to overcome a bilateral crisis, triggered by the incident at the Israeli embassy in Amman on July 2017. These understandings enabled the arrival of a new Israeli ambassador to Jordan, and are a positive and necessary development. Nevertheless, further steps are needed to improve relations between the countries and overcome the damage caused by the crisis. This document includes recommendations for Israeli officials and civil society actors. They are based on a series of policy dialogues and events on Israel-Jordan relations, carried out over the past year by the Mitvim Institute. These recommendations focus on the need to emphasize the importance of Israel-Jordan relations to the Israeli public, build trust with the Jordanians, strengthen cooperation between Israel and Jordan, acknowledge Jordan's special role in the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, recognize the linkage between Israel-Jordan relations and the Palestinian issue, and draw lessons from the crisis.

A. Emphasize the Importance of Israel-Jordan Relations to the Israeli Public

- Launch a public campaign in Israel emphasizing the importance of peace with Jordan. Peace with Jordan must be supported on both sides of the Israeli political spectrum, as it was when the peace treaty was originally signed.
- Emphasize the benefits of peace with Jordan to various audiences within the Israeli public, to challenge the misperception that only Jordan benefits from peace or that the benefits of peace are strictly limited to security.

B. Build Trust with the Jordanians

- Make a deliberate and structured appeal to the Jordanian people, not just to the government, to emphasize the importance of Jordan for Israel and the importance of the peace agreement. Israel should provide the Jordanian leadership with the tools to present the peace agreement with Israel as beneficial to the Jordanian public at large.
- Take symbolic steps to convey to the Jordanian public that relations with Jordan are important for Israel: statements by the Israeli leadership and interviews by the new Israel Ambassador to major media outlets in Jordan; a visit of President Rivlin or Knesset Speaker Edelstein to Jordan, including to the family of the Jordanian landlord who was accidentally killed at the incident in the Israeli Embassy in Amman; and a delegation to Jordan of Members of Knesset (MKs) from both coalition and opposition, or meetings in the Knesset between the Jordanian Ambassador and MKs from various parties. Similar steps on the part of the Jordanians should be encouraged as much as possible.

- Appoint a joint legal team to support the investigation of the incident at the Israeli Embassy in Amman that will: update the Jordanians on the materials and stages of the investigation; increase transparency; formulate legal steps to promote a solution; and leverage the flexibility shown by the Jordanians on the issue.

C. Strengthen Cooperation between Israel and Jordan

- Demonstrate commitment – in both statements and action – to continue existing and planned joint projects and to develop additional joint ventures. In addition, demonstrate sensitivity towards the infrastructure projects being developed by Israel near the border, and consider their implications for the Jordanians.
- Encourage visits by Israeli civil society delegations to Jordan (including researchers, heads of organizations, private sector employees, and environmental activists), to develop professional cooperation and relationships with Jordanians and to increase knowledge about Jordan and its relations with Israel.
- Identify Jordanian organizations and individuals that are willing to work with Israelis or in Israel on joint ventures (for example, in tourism), strengthen ties with them, improve the process of issuing entry permits to Israel, and increase the number of permits issued to Jordanians overall.
- Open a business lounge on the Israel-Jordan border that does not require entry permits for either of the countries, similar to the one opened at the Ephraim Gate crossing between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.
- Encourage collaboration, led by think tanks from both countries, between civil society organizations committed to strengthening bilateral relations between Israel and Jordan. Such cooperation may be possible through the sponsorship of a third party, potentially American or European, and will enable unofficial policy dialogues to take place.
- Increase the participation of Palestinian citizens of Israel in strengthening Israel-Jordan ties. The Palestinian citizens of Israel can serve as a connecting link between the two peoples and countries, especially in view of the presence of Arab students from Israel in Jordanian universities.
- Involve additional countries with whom Israel and Jordan have good relations, in an effort to strengthen cooperation between Israel and Jordan. These countries may include the US, Greece, Cyprus, China, and Egypt. The assumption is that if other actors benefit from the cooperation and peaceful relations between Israel and Jordan, they will also be encouraged to contribute to strengthening ties and help overcome future obstacles between the countries. Moreover, multilateral efforts are likely to encounter less criticism in Jordan than bilateral Israeli-Jordanian initiatives.

D. Acknowledge Jordan's Special Role in the Muslim Holy Sites in Jerusalem

- Announce Israel's commitment to the understandings that were previously reached regarding Jordan's special role in the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, and to preserving the status quo in the holy sites.

- Establish a formal joint coordination mechanism, which will also deal with crisis management and with improving management of the holy sites. In parallel, provide continuous updates to the King of Jordan and other Jordanian officials regarding changes and planned actions by Israel in Jerusalem, particularly around the holy sites.
- Be aware of potential tensions between Jordan and other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, regarding their impact on the reality in Jerusalem, and avoid unnecessary public statements that may fuel such tensions.

E. Recognize the Linkage between Israel-Jordan Relations and the Palestinian Issue

- Identify and map the unfulfilled potential of Israel-Jordan relations and present it to different target audiences, while recognizing the linkage between the Palestinian issue and the nature of Israel's relationship with Jordan. Discuss the existing and potential cooperation between the countries and the need to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as a condition for a real breakthrough in bilateral cooperation.
- Emphasize Jordan's previously proven ability to help reduce tensions between Israel and the Palestinians – especially with regard to Jerusalem – and to contribute to the peace process, and use this capacity in the efforts to renew Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.
- Unequivocally clarify that statements occasionally made by Israeli right-wing politicians saying that Jordan is the Palestinian state, that the Palestinians should be expelled from the West Bank to Jordan, and that Israeli sovereignty should be applied to the Temple Mount, do not represent Israel's policy, and even stand in contrast to it.

F. Draw Lessons from the Crisis

- Form a team in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to study and analyze the recent crisis in Israeli-Jordanian relations, draw lessons, and create guiding principles and an action plan for managing similar future crises, with Jordan or with other countries. The team will focus on crisis prevention and resolution, negotiation management, media activity, and managing legal aspects of crisis.
- Emphasize to Jordanian partners the contribution and commitment of the outgoing Israeli Ambassador to Amman, Einat Schlein, to strengthening Israel-Jordan relations, despite her unintended involvement in the crisis, and continuously draw on her relevant knowledge and expertise.
- Increase coordination and cooperation between the MFA and other official institutions in Israel regarding the relations with Jordan. This can be done through an inter-ministerial team led by the MFA and including the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Regional Cooperation, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection.