



## Common Perceptions:

Discovering the consensus between King Abdullah and Putin regarding the future of Southern Syria

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A Jordanian-Russian summit was held on August 23 in Moscow, during which several files pertaining to Lebanon and Palestine were discussed. However, the crisis in Southern Syria was on top of the list of discussions. This summit was preceded by several Jordanian decisions, which are believed to mark the beginning of some change in Jordanian policy toward Syria and toward the region in general.

### Grounds for the Jordanian Initiatives

The active Jordanian move to discuss the Syrian file with Russia may be attributed to several considerations that can be illustrated as follows:

**1- Russia's lack of commitment to keeping Iran away:** Jordan was one of the guarantor countries of the settlement agreement signed between the Syrian government and the armed factions of Daraa in 2018, which included a main clause stipulating that Russia guarantees to keep Iran away from the Jordanian and Israeli borders at a distance of 80 km. There was consensus over this between the US, Israel and Jordan.

Iran has recently succeeded in evading the aforementioned consensus, and therefore the Iranian threat to both Israel and Jordan has grown.

Against this background, on August 18, Israel launched a strike on Southern Syria, targeting a leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah in Quneitra, while Jordan's King Abdullah II revealed, on July 25, that Jordan was attacked by Iranian drones. Undoubtedly, King Abdullah II's visit to Moscow was aimed at restoring these understandings.

### 2- Reaching a mutual understanding with Moscow regarding the fate of Daraa:

The Syrian army gathered its forces near Daraa in an attempt to regain control of it. Moscow proposed a new settlement for the opposition fighters in Daraa, either to relinquish their weapons and stay in the city, or to move their weapons to the areas under the control of the armed opposition in Northern Syria.

Amman is definitely keen to ensure that the new understandings will not have any negative

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repercussions on it. Jordan fears that the deterioration of the military situation in Daraa may lead to a new surge of displacements of Daraa residents towards Jordan, which will pose more burden on the Jordanian economy which has been suffering for a while from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jordan is also worried that Iran may exploit the events in Daraa in order to expand the militias supported by it near Jordan's borders with Syria, and thus increase the chances of the Iranian threat to Jordanian security, and indirectly control the course of the commercial traffic between Jordan and Syria through the Jaber-Nassib border crossing, which is considered a major lifeline for the Jordanian economy.

This is in addition to the Jordanian military circles' concerns regarding the outbreak of clashes between Israel and the Iranian presence in Southern Syria, whether by drones or missiles. This is a major threat to Northern Jordan, through which Jordan may be forced to keep its forces on constant alert, which Jordan does not want to be drawn into in the medium and long terms.

**3- Opening and securing the border crossings with Syria:** Jordan wants to activate channels of trade exchange with Syria, so as to ensure that the Jaber-Naseeb border crossing between the two countries remains open at all times, and that all trade routes serving this crossing within Syria are fully secured, whether by the Syrian government or by Russia.

The crossing is a key lifeline for Jordanians, particularly for workers in the retail sector, land transport and others. Additionally, Syria is an important transshipment point for Turkish and Lebanese products to Jordan and the Gulf countries in both directions.

**4- The decline of the US role in Southern Syria:** The US and European strategies toward Syria have shifted from a policy of changing the Syrian government by force, to accepting it as a fait accompli, together with an attempt to pose pressure on President Bashar al-Assad to change some of his regional policies and to

reconsider his relations with Iran.

Jordan is also well aware that Washington no longer owns many pressure cards on Damascus, and that Russia now has several means to influence the Syrian government, both economically and militarily. Thus, Amman sought to communicate with it to reach understandings on Syria, specifically since Jordan is among the Arab countries that support improving relations with Damascus as well as Syria's restoration of its seat in the Arab League, which is supported by Moscow.

## Impact of the Bilateral Summit

It is clear that the meeting held between Putin and King Abdullah was successful, as Russia took some steps that reassured the Jordanian side. The agreements they reached and which could have positive consequences in the future, can be illustrated as follows:

### 1- Russia preventing the outbreak of war in Daraa:

The Fifth Corps of the Russian-operated Hmeimim base entered Daraa on August 24, one day after the summit of President Putin and King Abdullah II, which addressed the situation in Southern Syria. During the summit, King Abdullah confirmed the Jordanian-Russian rapprochement, adding that bilateral relations are constantly improving. This indicates that the Russian military move came after Russian-Jordanian understandings, to absorb the previously mentioned Jordanian concerns.

**2- Full normalization of Jordanian-Syrian relations:** The Russian TASS news agency revealed a new proposal presented by the Russian President to the King of Jordan during their summit on the Syrian file, to completely re-normalize relations between Jordan and Syria and to establish joint coordination between the two countries regarding the work of the Jaber-Nassib border crossing.

Jordan has recently been seeking to ease US sanctions on Syria, which was made clear during King Abdullah's summit with the US President last



July, in order to allow the return of commercial traffic between Syria, Jordan and other countries. Biden did not fully endorse this proposal, considering that this needs a congressional approval.

Jordan is also moving with the aim of reaching an agreement with the US, Israel and the EU countries in order to grant Russia some economic gains, such as supporting the reconstruction of Syria, in exchange for the Kremlin's cooperation in controlling Iranian militias in Syria.


### 3- Supporting Jordan's humanitarian role in

**Southern Syria:** Moscow wants Jordan to continue its commitment to alleviating the humanitarian situation in Syria, in general, and in Southern Syria, in particular, in terms of continuing to open the Jaber-Nassib crossing to trade movement between Syria, Jordan and the Gulf states, in addition to facilitating the crossing of individuals through the border crossing, allowing the entry of humanitarian aid. During King Abdullah II's recent visit to Washington, he had asked the US administration to provide exceptions to the restrictions imposed by the Caesar Act for humanitarian purposes.


In conclusion, these intensive and successive Jordanian moves in the Syrian file aim at a strategic repositioning of Jordan in a way that allows Jordan to play a new role in the political settlement of the Syrian conflict, in addition to contributing to Syria's return to the Arab League, and confronting Iranian influence in Syria. These moves coincide with Jordanian endeavors to ease economic pressures on Syria, allowing Jordan to benefit from the return of commercial traffic with Syria through the joint border crossing.

## ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

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