



Iran Approaches the Syria-Jordan Border

OE Watch Commentary: In the early stages of the Syrian conflict, President Bashar al-Assad famously quipped that Daraa Province, on the Syria-Jordan border, was as much a Jordanian problem as it was a Syrian one. Since November 2017, a growing number of Arabic-language media reports have highlighted Iran's growing influence in Daraa, something that inevitably affects Jordan. As the first accompanying excerpt suggests, "Iran does not aim to reach the Israel border with the Golan as much it wants to reach the Jordanian border."

A key element of Iran's strategy for gaining a foothold in Daraa involves establishing strong links with reliable allies on the ground. As the second article discusses, this effort predates the current conflict by several years and includes as its methods "spreading Shi'ism" and "gain[ing] loyalty in exchange for money and influence" in several parts of Daraa Province. Most recently, according to the article, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has established a new militia called the "Brigade 313" based in the Daraa town of Izraa. The article claims this group is present in one of the provincial capital's neighborhoods and that its members "have different security ID cards than those of the regime and have vast powers." Syrian army fighters, according to the article, are not allowed "into the neighborhoods they control without permission from the unit commander."

Iran's strategy for gaining a foothold in this area also includes diplomatic outreach. As the third accompanying article notes, recent geopolitical shifts have left the Jordanian government and people feeling "politically isolated [with] deep differences with our traditional allies." In response, "pundits have called on the leadership to react to such realities and open channels with perceived foes, including Iran." The article explains how several influential Jordanian writers have recently called on the kingdom to respond to Iranian overtures, with one of them noting: "We have to open the door for new players, especially those who stand with us... Iran is offering us economic partnership and we should accept." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"...[Jordanian] pundits have called on the leadership to react to such realities and open channels with perceived foes, including Iran..."

Source:

سيناريوهات عسكرية تنتظر الجنوب السوري

Dhiaa Awada. "Military Scenarios Awaiting Southern Syria," *Enab Baladi*, 24 December 2017. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/193437>

... Iran has become a prominent player in southern Syria... According to [Military Analyst Colonel Abdullah] al-Asaad, Iran does not aim to reach the Israel border with the Golan as much it wants to reach the Jordanian border and is currently focused on rural western Suwaida, of which it recently gained control. Al-Assad attributes this to the fact that Israel will not allow Iran to reach this border, which is confirmed by recent Israeli attacks and strikes on Iranian positions. Influential countries in southern Syria consider the arrival of Iranian militias to the Syria-Jordan border and the border with the occupied Golan as a "regional red line"...

Source:

اللواء 313 والتدخل الإيراني في درعا

Samir al-Saadi. "Brigade 313 and Iranian Intervention in Daraa," *al-Modon*, 11 November 2017. <https://goo.gl/Pf5gDL>

Iranian intervention in southern Syria began more than 10 years ago by spreading Shi'ism in the towns and villages of Shaykh Maskin, Nawa, Izraa, Qarfa and Bosra. Iran was also able to gain loyalty in exchange for money and influence. From this period until the Syrian Revolution was launched in 2011 many [Shi'a Mosques] were built in the region... In mid-2014 Iran began to organize its loyalists as the "Brigade 313" led by Mohammed Khodor (Abu Kazem) and numbering 75 members, with unlimited support and powers... "The Shi'a militiamen are based in the regime-controlled neighborhood of Dara'a al-Mahata and number no more than 100 members. They have different security ID cards than those of the regime and have vast powers." A [defected] officer also said that their clothing and food were also different, adding "They did not allow us into the neighborhoods they control without permission from the unit commander."

Source: Osama al-Sharif. "Amid shifting regional alliances, will Jordan open up to Iran?" *Al-Monitor*, 2 January 2018. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/01/jordan-iran-alliance-jerusalem-israel.html>

Still, there is a feeling of growing isolation and perhaps even marginalization by Jordan in light of shifting alliances and new geopolitical realities in the region. As such, pundits have called on the leadership to react to such realities and open channels with perceived foes, including Iran...

Amid such solemn developments, calls for Jordan to respond by improving ties with Tehran have been made by a number of influential pundits... Writing in the daily Al-Ghad on December 26, political commentator Mohammad Abu Rumman also called on the government to open up to Iran "especially now that Tehran is the gateway to Iraq with its vast market and standing offer to provide us with cheap oil." But, he added, "Such a move should not mean that we must change our alliances but to give us the chance to protect our national interests." Abu Rumman said, "We should be aware that we are politically isolated and that we have deep differences with our traditional allies." The editor of Al-Ghad, Jumana Ghuneimat, also called on Jordan to "review its traditional alliances at a time when Tehran is sending positive messages to Jordan." Writing on December 19, she said, "We have to open the door for new players, especially those who stand with us. ... Iran is offering us economic partnership and we should accept"...