

The Shiite Plan to Attack Israel from Jordan

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 11.03.2024

Israeli media revealed recently that the Axis of Resistance led by Iran has made plans to invade Israel via Jordan and carry out a large-scale terror attack against Israeli communities near the border. According to the report, Israel's defense establishment has identified increased motivation among Iraqi Shiite militia groups supported by Iran to attempt to attack Israel via Jordan using aerial platforms or by other means. Israel is preparing for a scenario in which Iraqi or Afghan Shiite terror cells, supported by Iran, try to invade Israeli territory via Jordan to carry out another massacre similar to October 7.

Since the U.S. overthrew Saddam Hussein's Baath regime in 2003, and following the Iraq War (2003-2011) and ISIS conflict (from 2014 onwards), Iran has entrenched itself in Iraq, thereby realizing its historical aspiration since the Safavid Empire (1501-1722), when it fought the Ottoman Empire for control of the Shia holy sites in Iraq. Thus, Iran has managed to take over the political and security arenas in post-Baath Iraq and turn them into important elements of the Shiite "crescent" developing in the Middle East. Accordingly, part of Iraqi territory serves as an important link in the land corridor supplying weapons delivered by the Iranian Quds Force to the Axis of Resistance proxies in Syria, as well as to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Jordan's King Abdullah is increasingly aware of the Iranians breathing down his neck. He first used the term the 'Shiite Crescent' in 2004, when he warned against Iran gaining control over Iraq by intervening in the Iraqi parliamentary elections of January 2005. The Shiite Crescent, he cautioned at the time, would cause a shift in the traditional power balance between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East, threatening the interests of the United States and its allies. Jordan's concern over the severity of the Iranian threat grew when Iran used the Syrian Civil War (2011-2020) to deploy Shiite militia groups to Jordan's north.

In 2014, after Iran identified Jordan as fertile ground and a key arena for tightening the encirclement of Israel, Khamenei publicized the order he had given to arm the West Bank, declaring that "the West Bank should be armed just like

Gaza.” As part of its attempt to lure Jordan to defect to the Axis of Resistance in 2012, Tehran offered the Hashemite Kingdom a free supply of oil and energy-based products for 30 years in exchange for allowing Iran to engage in religious tourism on its soil and providing the goods Tehran requires. King Abdullah, who relies heavily on U.S. support and Israeli intelligence, refused.

Over the following decade, there were several periods during which Iran accelerated its attempt to implement Khamenei’s directive to arm the West Bank via Jordan. As part of these efforts, several weapons deliveries intended for terrorists in the West Bank were seized on the Jordanian border, most of which likely originated in Iran. In response, Jordan increased its oversight of weapon and drug smuggling attempts from Syria, which included attempts to smuggle a wide range of weapons, such as Fajr rockets and Claymore charges produced by Iran and intended for the West Bank.

The Royal Jordanian Air Force even targeted a leader of one of the smuggling networks in December 2023 on Syrian soil as part of an attack against the hideouts used by smugglers supported by Iran and Hezbollah in the Syrian As-Suwayda Governorate, near the Jordanian border. The attack was part of Jordan’s campaign against captagon trafficking, as this illegal form of drug trade finances the spread of pro-Iranian and pro-governmental militia groups in Syria.

In addition to Iran’s subversive activity within Jordan, Tehran’s hope that its normalization agreement with Riyadh would serve as a significant lever for drawing closer to Amman seems to have been unfulfilled thus far. The reason is likely anger and concern among members of Jordan’s government and media elite over Iran’s subversive efforts in the Hashemite Kingdom.

Following the October 7, 2023 Hamas massacre and the continuing attacks from Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israel has internalized the severity of the threat posed from both the south and north, realizing that it can no longer accept the existence of Iran-supported terror organizations posing a grave threat to its national security. The potential threat posed by the Axis of Resistance on Israel’s eastern border is also severe, requiring Israel to prepare accordingly in cooperation with Jordan. Jordan is well aware of the severity of the threat that Iran poses to it, which reached a peak in Iran’s infringement of Jordan’s sovereignty in late January 2024, when Iranian proxies attacked the U.S. military outpost Tower 22 in northeast Jordan, killing 3 U.S. soldiers.

It is highly unlikely that the plan to invade Israel from its eastern border is being formulated solely by Shiite militia groups, as such a significant terror attack cannot be carried out unless directed or, at the very least, supported by Iran. IRGC commander Hossein Salami publicly posited the idea in early December that the Palestinians would repeat the "Al Aqsa flood" attack, this time from Israel's north, south and east to ensure Israel's annihilation.

Therefore, and in light of senior Israeli defense establishment officials' warnings prior to the month of Ramadan, it seems that Iran is seeking to take advantage of the crisis with which Israel is grappling to deliver a decisive blow in the form of a murderous terror attack in the West Bank. The Iranian modus operandi, as reported by the Israeli media, is to prefer the use of proxies, due to Tehran's fear of entering a direct confrontation with Israel.

At this stage it is unclear whether the Axis of Resistance led by Iran is fully prepared to put its invasion plan into practice. The fact that such plans were revealed by the media may decrease the likelihood of their execution. Nevertheless, Israel must relate to this Iranian terror scheme with utmost seriousness.

First, Israel should prepare its intelligence and make operational plans in cooperation with Jordan to curb the attack, should it indeed be launched. Working closely with Jordan to thwart this terror scheme would advance another crucial Israeli interest as well, as it would help mitigate tensions between the two countries, which have increased since the war in Gaza began. At the same time, the Iranian chain of command directing this impending terror attack should be identified and, in accordance with the invasion plan's progress, one of its senior officials should be targeted in advance. This would make it clear to Tehran that Israel is determined to thwart the Iran-led Axis of Resistance's terror scheme, and will not allow its citizens to be massacred again.