

# Canada is training Jordanian forces to secure border with Syria

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Canadian military teams have provided the Jordanian Armed Forces with equipment and training programmes as part of a partnership that marks a closer relationship between the two countries and a greater Canadian engagement in the Middle East security and stabilisation efforts.

Canada concluded its train-and-equip programme in early January in Jordan with training on air-strike coordination and the delivery of military equipment to the Jordanian Armed Forces' Quick Reaction Force. Canadian Forces Captain Vincent Bouchard told the Ottawa Citizen's blog Defence Watch that future training situations have been requested by Jordan but "are still in the planning stages."

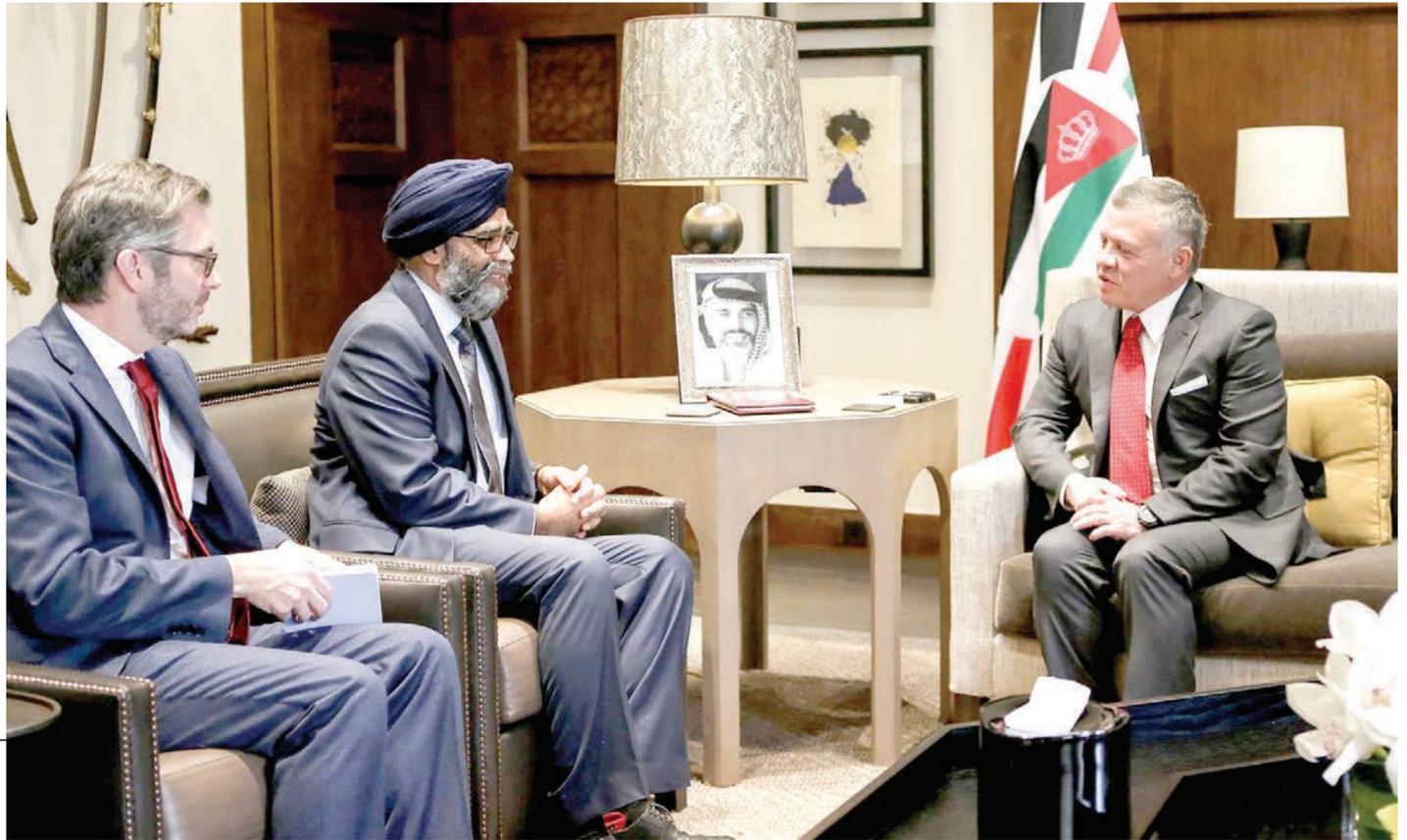
In February 2016, the liberal government in Ottawa announced a new approach to its involvement in the Middle East. The Middle East Engagement Strategy included the cessation of Canada's bombing operations over Iraq and Syria, which changed the nature of its anti-ISIS contribution to military training and advising.

It also incorporated a 3-year investment of \$1.6 billion to enhance regional security and stabilisation, provide humanitarian assistance and increase diplomatic engagement in the Levant.

Building off this commitment, Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with Jordan in May 2016 to increase security cooperation between the two countries and enable Canada's Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (START) and the Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Programme to operate in Jordan and provide necessary assistance.

"Canada's support to Jordan is yet another demonstration of our commitment to global security and stability in the Middle East," said Byrne Furlong, press secretary to Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan.

Furlong said Canada's military presence in the Middle East was intended to help ensure the long-term stability of its regional partners. The exact number of Canadian troops in



Helping hand. A 2017 file picture shows Jordanian King Abdullah II (R) receiving Canada's Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan (C) in Amman. (AFP)

Jordan – who arrived in late August 2016 – could not be disclosed "due to operational security."

Jordan, a key Middle Eastern ally to the United States, has been relatively successful in weathering the conflict of the violence-torn region. However, conflicts across the borders have still had an effect.

Terrorist attacks targeting security forces and civilians have struck Jordan in the past few years, primarily in northern Jordan, along its borders with Syria and Iraq.

In his most recent visit to Canada last August, Jordanian King Abdullah II referenced Canada's support for Jordan's border security during a news conference with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. In December, during a visit to Jordan, Sajjan announced that Canada would support the kingdom in building a road along

its northern border with Syria to enhance Jordanian forces' capabilities to respond to security threats.

Furlong said Canadian forces were supporting the Jordanian Army Engineer Corps in building defensive structures along a dedicated section of the Syria-Jordan border. "This specific section is one of the busiest areas in terms of cross-border activity and the highest priority for augmenting security for [Jordanian forces]," she added.

"These defensive stores will assist Jordan in strengthening its border

security and will help to address the spread of crime, terrorism and extremism within the region."

Amman has foiled several plots by al-Qaeda affiliates and the Islamic State (ISIS) in the last two years. In November 2017, Jordanian forces stopped plans to attack military institutions, media stations and religious figures, Jordanian intelligence services said.

With ISIS nearly collapsing in Syria and Iraq, it is shifting its tactics in ways that could leave Jordan vulnerable. The group is expected to decentralise its operations and adopt insurgency tactics, which could threaten well-secured regions.

Although challenged by internal and external factors, Jordan plays a critical role in the anti-ISIS coalition and serves as an ally to Western powers, particularly Canada.

"Jordan... is in many ways the success story for Canada in the region," Thomas Juneau, a professor of public and international affairs at the University of Ottawa specialising in Canada-Middle East relations, wrote in a recent paper.

"Canada has a strong defence, diplomatic, security, development and humanitarian presence in the country," wrote Juneau. "This allows Canada to have an impact and, most importantly, is in line with its interests," signifying that any instability to Jordan's security seriously concerns Canada, the United States and their allies.

Abdulrahman al-Masri reports on politics and news in the Middle East and Syria in particular. He can be followed on Twitter: @AbdulrhmanMasri.

● **Canada concluded its train-and-equip programme in early January in Jordan.**

## Viewpoint

# US aid cuts to the Palestinian Authority would primarily benefit radical Hamas



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**The United States could be pushed to the sidelines, leaving a void for other parties, such as Russia, to fill.**

US President Donald Trump recently warned countries opposed to America's policies that his country would no longer give them financial aid. That, he suggested, would go only to "friends."

Many experts say Trump's remarks were primarily meant for the Palestinian Authority (PA). Palestinians and their leaders are outraged at the US president's grand peace plans for the Middle East, on terms that are extraordinarily favourable to the Israelis. In December, Trump announced that the United States would move its embassy to Jerusalem, which it regarded as Israel's capital.

Trump seemingly believes he has all the cards. The United States is the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority. It gives about \$400 million a year to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, of which \$363 million goes directly to US Agency for International Development projects; \$36 million is for the PA's security forces.

Trump wants to use America's financial assistance to force the Palestinians to the negotiat-



Bargaining chip. Palestinian refugees collect aid parcels at a UN food distribution centre in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, on January 28. (AFP)

ing table with Israel but, after his announcement on Jerusalem, the Palestinians say they will not work with this US administration on peace plans and will talk to Russia and the European Union instead.

What if Trump did cut funding for the Palestinians in half? It would hurt the PA in the West Bank and the effects would be felt even more deeply by Palestinians in Gaza, an area controlled by Hamas.

This brings us back to the question of the \$36 million given to PA security forces. Part of the reason the PA gets this money is for its forces to work with their Israeli counterparts to lower the security threat emanating from the West Bank.

Unsurprisingly then, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is not particularly enthusiastic that PA security forces might no longer be able to help Israel keep an eye

on the West Bank. Security would worsen for Israeli citizens. If Israel established more of a security presence in the West Bank, it would further undermine its world image. If Trump decides to reduce funding for UNRWA projects but keeps the security assistance intact, it's hard to see Palestinians agreeing to that.

The real winner of Trump's meddling could be Hamas. Cutting funding to the PA would reduce its effectiveness and importance in the eyes of Palestinians, prompting them to turn to Hamas, especially in the West Bank. Reducing the numbers and scope of the PA security forces could embolden Hamas to attack Israel.

All in all, it's difficult to see anything positive coming out of Trump's funding threats. As has often been said, this US president appears to look at the Middle East as just another real estate deal rather than a complex political issue. If anything, Trump's blundering rhetoric could illustrate the perils of being too clever by half.

Instead of giving him the authority and the victory he so desperately wants, the United States could be pushed to the sidelines, leaving a void for other parties, such as Russia, to fill.