



Jordan and the New Front in the Fight Against ISIS

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After taking large swaths of territory in the Levant, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is now trying to extend the chaos of the Syrian Civil War into Jordan. Despite its weak military capabilities compared to the Hashemite Kingdom, ISIS believes it can threaten Jordan by increasing tensions in the domestic arena while drawing the Kingdom into the seemingly endless Syrian Civil War. Hoping to exacerbate Jordan's already struggling economy and massive refugee problem, the Islamic State sees attacking the Hashemite Kingdom as an opportunity to increase the group's legitimacy in the region. In short, de-stabilizing the state of Jordan would allow the Islamic State to greatly expand its regional presence. This paper will address why the Islamic State wants to attack Jordan, how the group plans on carrying out its assault, and the Kingdom's response to extremist threats on and within its borders.

- The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past eighteen months, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has captured large swaths of territory amidst a growing authoritarian breakdown across the Middle East, quickly establishing itself as a dangerous regional actor. So far, ISIS's territory is limited to the war-stricken states of Iraq and Syria, as the group has largely ignored Turkey to its north. While cautious of provoking regional power and NATO member Turkey into confronting the group militarily, ISIS has been far less restrained with regards to its enemy to the south, Jordan.¹

Since joining the U.S. led international coalition against the Islamic State last September, the Hashemite monarchy of Jordan has become increasingly involved in the fight against ISIS. This involvement only intensified after the group's release of a video displaying the barbaric immolation of Jordanian pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh this past February. The highly publicized death of the captured pilot prompted a strong response from Jordan's King Abdullah, who executed two convicted terrorists and carried out a series of air strikes in Syria in the days following the release of the video.² But Jordan's citizenry does not seem to share its king's strong proclivity for vengeance.

Jordan's participation in the U.S. led coalition against the Islamic State has been subjected to heavy criticism in the Kingdom; as groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and

¹ Noah Feldman, "Why Jordan is Islamic State's Next Target," *Bloomberg View*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.bloombergvew.com/articles/2015-02-09/why-jordan-is-islamic-state-s-next-target>.

² *The Jerusalem Post* Staff, "Lieberman praises Jordan's King Abdullah for 'harsh response' to pilot's execution by ISIS," *Jerusalem Post*, February 2, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Lieberman-praises-Jordans-King-Abdullah-for-harsh-response-to-pilots-execution-by-ISIS-389956>.

even members of the Jordanian parliament have spoken out against military intervention in the Levant.³ By drawing Jordan into the seemingly endless Syrian Civil War, the Islamic State hopes to isolate the Hashemite Monarchy from its largely anti-interventionist citizenry. ISIS barely poses a direct threat Jordan's military, but the group can bolster its support in the kingdom by taking advantage of Jordan's fragile economy and domestic instability. Indeed, if Jordan wants to effectively confront the Islamic State, the monarchy will need to emphasize social and economic reform over military involvement.

WHY DOES ISIS CARE ABOUT JORDAN?

The rise of ISIS has long been connected to Jordanian civil and political life. In 2005 Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the group that would later become ISIS, carried out a deadly string of suicide attacks in Amman, killing 57 people.⁴ Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, AQI's founder and the mastermind of the Amman attacks, was born in the Jordanian city of Zarqa and maintained a strong hatred for the Hashemite Kingdom until his death in 2006. (Zarqawi was killed in northern Iraq by a U.S. air strike.)⁵ Yet the group's motivation to attack the U.S. backed monarchy of Jordan has continued since Zarqawi's death. For ISIS, Jordan is not just another state neighboring its conquered territory. The

³ Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

⁴ Suha Ma'ayeh, "How Jordan Got Pulled Into the Fight Against ISIS," *Time*, February 26, 2015, <http://time.com/3721793/jordan-fight-against-isis>.

⁵ Ibid.

leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria see Jordan as an embodiment of Western influence in the Muslim world.⁶

Jordan has the highest per capita rate of foreign fighters in the world.⁷ Since the start of the Syrian Civil War, over 2,000 Jordanian citizens have crossed the border into war-torn Syria to join radical militant groups; most commonly ISIS and its Salafist rival Jabhat al-Nusra.⁸ Posing a greater regional threat than the generation of Al-Qaeda affiliated Jordanian jihadists of the early 2000's, Jordanians fighting with the Islamic State are less concerned with global jihad and more focused on the “near enemy,” Jordan and its allies in the Arab world.⁹

Yet ISIS sees the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as much more than a nearby recruiting ground. For the Islamic State, Jordan is an opportune target. While ISIS does not pose a direct military threat to Jordan's borders, the Islamic State can indeed challenge Jordanian sovereignty by more indirect means. Leaders of the Islamic State see challenging the Jordanian monarchy as a way of legitimizing themselves while delegitimizing Jordanian sovereignty from within.¹⁰

For the Islamic State, drawing Jordan into a direct conflict with their forces would legitimize the group as a more permanent regional actor. Jordan's air campaign has

⁶ “The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot,” *Dabiq Issue 7*, February 2015, 5.

⁷ Michael Pizzi, “Foreign fighters come home to roost in Jordan” *Al-Jazeera*, June 5, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/5/jordans-foreign-fighters-come-home-to-roost.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mona Alami, “The New Generation of Jordanian Jihadi Fighters,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 18, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/02/18/new-generation-of-jordanian-jihadi-fighters/h17c>.

¹⁰ Noah Feldman, “Why Jordan is Islamic State's Next Target,” *Bloomberg View*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-02-09/why-jordan-is-islamic-state-s-next-target>.

already helped this cause, and if Jordan were to later commit ground troops in the fight against ISIS, this would further solidify the Islamic State as a major regional actor. Escalation of the conflict on the Jordanian side would justify violence on the side of ISIS as defensive measures, a move that would help garner support for the Islamic State across the region.¹¹ Attacking Jordanian interests currently stands as a win-win situation for ISIS leaders.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has put the Hashemite Kingdom in a difficult position. In response to the rising threat of the ISIS, Jordan's King Abdullah must combat the militant group without isolating Jordan's "East Bank" and "West Bank" populations, whose support is essential to the strength of the monarchy.¹² The Jordanian Monarchy owes its existence to the support of its two largest contingencies, "East Banker" ur-Jordanians and "West Banker" Palestinian Jordanians, with the latter population far outnumbering the former.¹³ While strong patronage networks have long kept these two groups loyal to the monarchy, stagnant economic growth, coupled with broad opposition to Jordanian intervention in the Levant is now threatening Abdullah's base of support.¹⁴ Moreover, the close to 700,000 Syrian refugees living in Jordan has only heightened tensions within the Kingdom.¹⁵ Well aware of Jordan's growing

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sultan Barakat & Andrew Leber, "Fortress Jordan: Putting the Money to Work," *Brookings Institute*, February 3, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/02/03-jordan-barakat-leber/fortress-jordan-english.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Zvi Bar'el, "King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan," *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

domestic concerns, ISIS sees Jordan as an opportunity to extend regional chaos beyond Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State's growing interest in Jordan proves that the group does not just operate in failed states; it is now seeking to create them.

ISIS's Execution of a Jordanian Pilot

On February 3rd, 2015 the Islamic State released a video showing captured Jordanian pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh being burned alive. The graphic video horrified viewers across the world and prompted a quick response from Jordan's King Abdullah, who executed two convicted terrorists and carried out a series of airstrikes against ISIS following the news of al-Kasasbeh's death.¹⁶ Many Jordanians similarly rallied in support of the pilot's family, condemning the Islamic State. The video brought ISIS back into the forefront of Jordanian national thought. Unfortunately for the Hashemite Monarchy, the video also exposed Jordan's role in American led coalition air strikes.

ISIS's barbaric immolation of Moath al-Kasasbeh undoubtedly shocked and angered citizens across Jordan. Nonetheless, Jordanian intervention in Iraq and Syria is expected to long outlive its citizenry's eagerness for revenge against the Islamic State.¹⁷ Prior to al-Kasasbeh's execution, the trending hashtag on Jordanian social media was "#thisisnotourwar." For many Jordanians, foreign intervention is seen as participation in

¹⁶ Greg Botelho & Jomana Karadsheh, "Jordan unleashes wrath on ISIS: 'This is just the beginning,'" *CNN*, February 6, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/05/world/isis-jordan/>.

¹⁷ Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

a western led campaign against Muslims.¹⁸ ISIS is well aware of this sentiment, and as Jordanians begin to forget about Moath al-Kasasbeh, the Islamic State hopes that public resentment will turn towards the Monarchy itself.¹⁹

The Islamic State, like any terrorist group, relies heavily on fear and brutality to appear stronger than it actually is. The publicized execution of Jordanian pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh is a testament to this strategy.²⁰ ISIS is indeed militarily weak compared most regional state actors. But by burning a man alive, ISIS once again got the world's attention. As much as this barbaric act enraged Jordanians, al-Kasasbeh's immolation similarly brought to light Jordan's role in coalition air strikes. As the dust settles, the Islamic State hopes that Jordanians will come to blame the pilot's death on their own leaders.²¹

ISIS's Strategy in Jordan

The Islamic State has obviously refrained from publishing any sort of multi-point plan illustrating its strategy in Jordan. ISIS's approach towards confronting the Hashemite Kingdom, however, can be largely deduced by analyzing the group's actions and publications. In this case, understanding ISIS's strategy is indeed very important.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Brian Jenkins, "ISIS's Calculated Barbarity," *Rand Corporation*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/02/isiss-calculated-barbarity.html>

²¹ Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

By better understanding the nature of the ISIS threat, policy makers can more easily construe ways of effectively confronting it.

Unable to directly challenge the Jordanian military; ISIS's strategy in the Hashemite Kingdom is instead centered on destabilizing the Monarchy from within. Since the declaration of "the caliphate" in June of 2014, the Islamic State has appeared to pursue three main objectives in Jordan. Foremost, ISIS wants to exacerbate Jordan's already sizable socio-economic problems.²² The group has pursued this objective by blocking Jordanian trade routes in Iraq and Syria and by provoking King Abdullah into taking military action in the Levant. As export opportunities dwindle, and Jordanians become increasingly frustrated with their regime's excessive military spending, Islamic State leaders hope to gain legitimacy within Jordan; or at the very least delegitimize Jordan's king.²³

Along with aggravating Jordan's already concerning socio-economic situation, the Islamic State is looking to evoke repressive actions from King Abdullah. ISIS's publicized burning of a Jordanian pilot illustrates this strategy point. "The gruesome manner of al-Kasasbeh's death is classic revolutionary polarization strategy," asserts regional analyst and former British intelligence officer Alastair Crooke.²⁴ By outraging "authority" and provoking a harsh response from Jordan's King, ISIS hopes that

²² Noah Feldman, "Why Jordan is Islamic State's Next Target," *Bloomberg View*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-02-09/why-jordan-is-islamic-state-s-next-target>.

²³ Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

²⁴ Alastair Crooke, "Is Jordan Facilitating ISIS' Grand Strategy?" *Huffington Post*, February 13, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/isis-jordan-strategy_b_6674252.html.

repressive action on the part of Abdullah will turn previously peaceful Islamic State sympathizers into active insurgents.²⁵

Finally, Jordan epitomizes the Islamic State's idea of "the near enemy." Contrary to Salafist rival Al-Qaeda, ISIS asserts that confronting regional authoritarians is more important than attacking the West.²⁶ For the Islamic State, turning grievances in the Muslim world away from Western foreign policy and towards regional leaders like Jordan's King Abdullah is essential to the group's success.²⁷ The Islamic States thrives in areas lacking state control; therefore, attacking the legitimacy of the Hashemite monarchy is the first step in the group's long-term goal of creating chaos in Jordan.

JORDAN'S DOMESTIC VULNERABILITY

The Islamic State's strategic interests in the Hashemite Kingdom lie in the apparent vulnerabilities of the Jordanian monarchy. Facing vast challenges on a number of fronts, Jordan's domestic strains are only exacerbated by the derisive threat of ISIS. Jordan's participation in the U.S. led coalition against ISIS has been met with strong criticism by those who believe that the Kingdom should be allocating its funds elsewhere. The major economic and social issues facing Jordan have created ideal conditions for the Islamic State to launch an ideological assault on its enemy to the south.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Abu Jarir Ash- Shamali "Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan," *Dabiq Issue 6*, December 2014, 44.

²⁷ Mona Alami, "The New Generation of Jordanian Jihadi Fighters," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 18, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/02/18/new-generation-of-jordanian-jihadi-fighters/h17c>.

Jordan's Economy

Years of fighting in Iraq and Syria have had a devastating effect on Jordan's economy. According to Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour, "Jordan's economy faces its worst situation in history."²⁸ Foreign investment has fallen from \$3.1 billion in 2006 to \$1.5 billion since 2011 as Jordan has amassed a budget deficit of close to \$2.5 billion.²⁹ More importantly, Jordan's budgetary restraints are becoming a dangerous threat to national security within the Kingdom.

The strength of the Jordanian state has long relied on an "authoritarian bargain" between the king and the citizenry. This "bargain" encourages Jordanians to turn a blind eye to the authoritarian nature of the kingdom in exchange for the promise of guaranteed educational and employment opportunities.³⁰ While authoritarian "bargains" have long protected the monarchy, the Syrian Civil War, ISIS, and the ensuing waves of refugees are threatening Jordan's ability to maintain its state-centered economy.³¹ Among Jordan's economic problems, unemployment is particularly concerning. Official unemployment in the Kingdom has been reported at 12%, but it is widely believed that the actual rate of unemployment in Jordan is closer to 30%. In Jordan's most

²⁸ David Schenker, "Preventing ISIS Inroads in Jordan," *Washington Institute*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/preventing-isis-inroads-in-jordan>.

²⁹ Zvi Bar'el, "King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan," *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

³⁰ Raj Desai, "Authoritarian Bargain Collapses in Middle East," *Brookings Institute*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/02/02-egypt-desai>.

³¹ Zvi Bar'el, "King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan," *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

economically depressed cities, particularly Ma'an and Zarqa, these numbers are expected to be even higher.³² In these cities it is not just ideology that drives Jordanians to sympathize with the Islamic State, it is also poverty.³³

In August of 2014 King Abdullah told state economic leaders that “today [Jordan] is facing enormous challenges on more than one front, foremost of which are the economic challenges.” The King then continued to assert that these challenges are all indeed linked.³⁴ Jordan may have a strong military and intelligence apparatus, but force alone cannot guarantee order in the Kingdom. With 30% of Jordanians between the ages of 19 and 24 unemployed, the Hashemite Monarchy will need to confront its economic problems before internal security concerns can be relieved.³⁵

The Refugee Crisis

An influx of refugees from Iraq and Syria also stands as a major threat to economic and social order in Jordan.³⁶ As of 2015, over 680,000 Syrians and 30,000 Iraqis live in Jordan after being displaced by either the Islamic State or other militant

³² David Schenker, “Preventing ISIS Inroads in Jordan,” *Washington Institute*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/preventing-isis-inroads-in-jordan>.

³³ David Kenner, “The Men Who Love the Islamic State,” *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/04/islamic-state-jordan-zarqa/>.

³⁴ David Schenker, “Preventing ISIS Inroads in Jordan,” *Washington Institute*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/preventing-isis-inroads-in-jordan>.

³⁵ David Kenner, “The Men Who Love the Islamic State,” *Foreign Policy*, February 4, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/04/islamic-state-jordan-zarqa/>.

³⁶ Zvi Bar'el, “King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan,” *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

groups fighting in the Syrian Civil War.³⁷ (Syrian refugees and economic migrants now make up 21% of the country's population.³⁸) Adding to Jordan's inability to support its large state-sector, Syrian refugees are becoming a major burden on the Kingdom's budget, forcing Jordan to allocate precious funds towards refugee services. Money previously used to employ Jordanians in state-owned enterprises is now being spent on the state's exceedingly large refugee population.³⁹

Refugees fleeing the crisis in Iraq and Syria are not just taking up resources from the Jordanian state; they are also taking Jordanian jobs. Willing to work for lower wages and without benefits, Syrian refugees are replacing Jordanian workers in low-paying jobs across the Kingdom. In major industries like agriculture and construction, Syrian refugees have already replaced 30% of Jordanian workers.⁴⁰

With the vast majority of Jordan's refugee population living in cities as opposed to refugee camps, the presence of Syrian and Iraqi migrants is becoming increasingly apparent across the Kingdom. (85% of Syrian refugees live outside of the state's refugee camps.)⁴¹ In the case of Jordanian schools, children of refugees are overcrowding classrooms, angering local parents.⁴² Unfortunately, the massive influx of Syrian and

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Signing of a Memorandum of Understandings for U.S. Bilateral Assistance to Jordan," *U.S. Department of State*, February 3, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/02/237134.htm>.

³⁹ Zvi Bar'el, "King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan," *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rania Abouzeid, "Jordan's rural poor chafe under the burden of hosting Syrian refugees," *Al-Jazeera*, October 21, 2013, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/21/jordana-s-rural-poorchafeundertheburdenofhostingsyrianrefugees.html>.

Iraqi refugees in Jordan is a lose-lose-situation for everyone involved. Refugees are facing increased discrimination while Jordanian citizens are being forced to forfeit educational and employment opportunities as a result of the fighting in Iraq and Syria.

Reform, Security, and Repression in Jordan

Adding insult to injury, the repressive nature of Jordan's security state continues to anger citizens in light of already high unemployment and a long list of other economic and social concerns. As King Abdullah struggles to fulfill his end of the "authoritarian bargain," Jordanians have become increasingly frustrated with the coercive nature of their state. Jordan may have "weathered the storm" of the Arab Spring, but a stagnant economy and increased security crackdowns in the wake of the rise of ISIS are now driving Jordanians to once again question the legitimacy of their monarchy and its security apparatus.⁴³

Following the events of the Arab Spring, Jordan appeared to have created a "third way," avoiding both a revolution and a counter-revolution by pursuing "reform."⁴⁴ Attempting to appear more transparent, the monarchy allowed popular opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to remain legal and politically active. Without the option of "buying off" its citizenry (a luxury long held by the oil rich states of the Arabian Gulf) Jordan appeared to successfully confront protests in 2011 with a tactful mix of security

⁴³ Curtis Ryan, "Security dilemmas and the 'security state' question in Jordan," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, December 29, 2014, <http://pomeps.org/2014/12/29/security-dilemmas-and-the-security-state-question-in-jordan/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

and reform.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, Islamist threats, particularly ISIS, are now threatening this détente of sorts between the King and Jordan's citizenry. In April of 2014, Jordan adopted a new set of anti-terrorism laws with penalties for convicted terrorists ranging from ten years in prison to death. According to deputy leader of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood Zaki Bani Rashid, these new laws "will give Jordanian authorities a new card to punish and scrutinize opposition groups."⁴⁶ Three months later, the Jordanian parliament (strongly influenced by the king) further enraged critics by granting the monarch the official authority to appoint the heads of the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and the General Intelligence Directorate (GID).⁴⁷ Both laws marked major departures from the King's promises for reform just a few years prior.

The Islamic State has indeed increased the pressure on Jordan's long-standing security apparatus. In fact, Jordan's harsh response to the threat of Islamic extremism is exactly what Islamic State leaders want to see in the Hashemite Kingdom. By taking such draconian measures against terrorist threats, King Abdullah is isolating himself from his citizenry by wrapping populist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and nonviolent Salafist leaders into the same category as the Islamic State.

⁴⁵ Noah Feldman, "Why Jordan is Islamic State's Next Target," *Bloomberg View*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-02-09/why-jordan-is-islamic-state-s-next-target>.

⁴⁶ "ISIS Sanctuary: June 19, 2015," *Institute for the Study of War*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis-sanctuary-june-19-2015>.

⁴⁷ David Schenker, "Preventing ISIS Inroads in Jordan," *Washington Institute*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/preventing-isis-inroads-in-jordan>.

ISIS'S THREAT TO JORDAN

In June of 2014 the Islamic State captured the Iraqi city of al-Rutba, just 90 miles north of the Jordanian border.⁴⁸ Following the capture of al-Rutba, Iraqi government forces withdrew from much of the area, leaving the Iraqi side of the Jordanian/Iraqi border largely in the hands of local Sunni tribes. These tribes, aligned with the Jordanian Monarchy, now stand as the largest force fighting ISIS along the Jordanian/Iraqi border.⁴⁹ The Iraqi government troops that do remain in the area have been subject to frequent attacks from the Islamic State. Earlier this year, an ISIS suicide bombing on Iraqi border security personnel left four dead and eight injured.⁵⁰ After continued attacks in the region, little stands between the Islamic State and Jordan's 110-mile border with Iraq.

ISIS is indeed on Jordan's doorstep, but that does not mean that the Islamic State poses a direct threat to Jordan's territorial sovereignty. The Jordanian Armed Forces far outnumber ISIS fighters in the area and are similarly bolstered by superior hardware and strong support from the United States. In short, it would be all but impossible for ISIS to penetrate Jordan by directly confronting the JAF.⁵¹ While direct confrontation on the ground between ISIS and the JAF remains unlikely at the moment, the Islamic State is indeed threatening the Hashemite Kingdom with its ability to disrupt trade and travel

⁴⁸ David Schenker, "Countering the ISIS Threat to Jordan," *Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/david-schenker-countering-the-isis-threat-to-jordan-1405290956>.

⁴⁹ Nikita Malik & Abdullah Shami, "Jordan: The Jewel in the ISIS Crown," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 24, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=55995>.

⁵⁰ Al-Arabiya News Staff, "ISIS claims Iraqi-Jordanian border crossing attack," *Al-Arabiya News*, April 25, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/04/25/Car-bombings-target-Iraq-Jordan-border-crossing.html>.

⁵¹ Noah Feldman, "Why Jordan is Islamic State's Next Target," *Bloomberg View*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-02-09/why-jordan-is-islamic-state-s-next-target>.

along Jordan's borders.⁵² Furthermore, ISIS's presence near Jordan has allowed the group to expand its threat within the Kingdom.⁵³

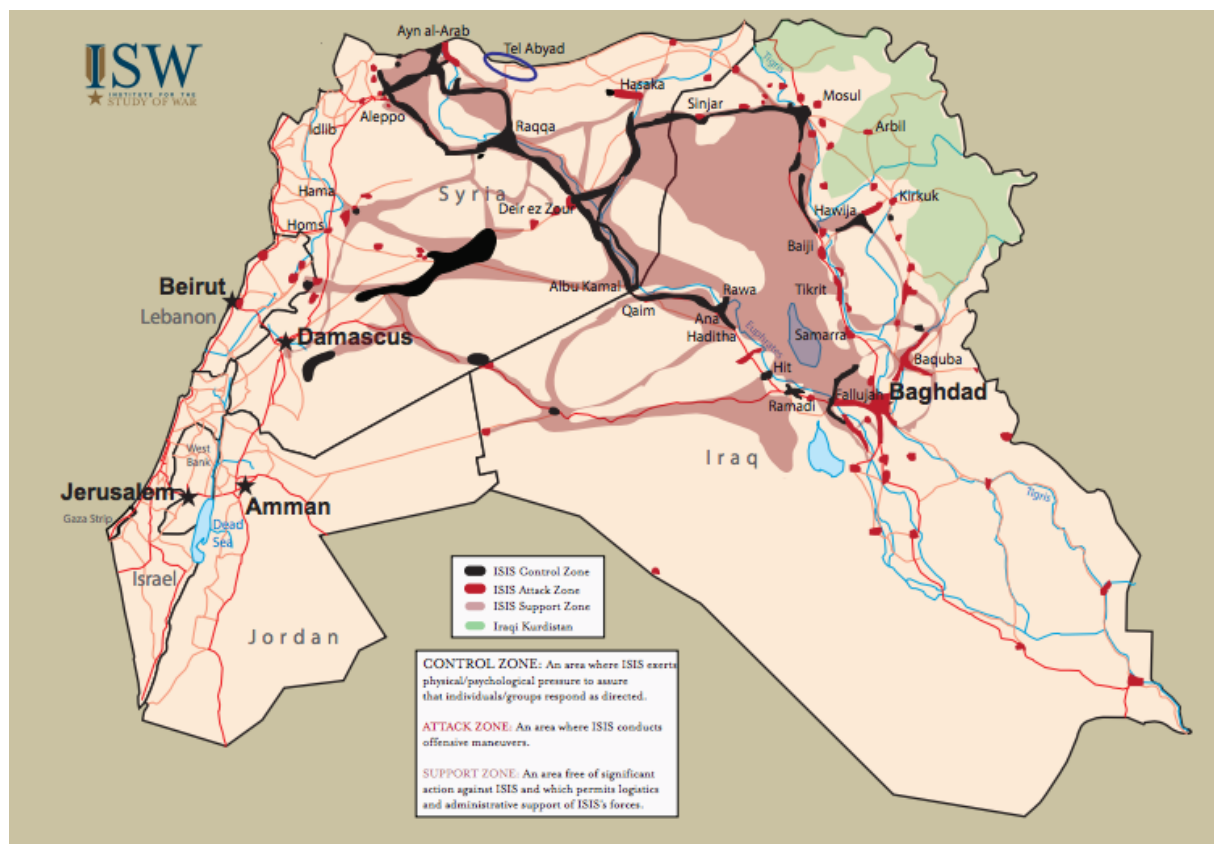


Figure 1: This map from the *Institute for the Study of War* illustrates areas under ISIS control/group attack & support zones as of June 2015.⁵⁴

⁵² Zvi Bar'el, "King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan," *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

⁵³ Taylor Luck, "Jordan strengthens security along Iraqi border as ISIL makes gains," *Jordan Times*, June 15, 2014, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-strengthens-security-along-iraqi-border-isil-makes-gains>.

⁵⁴ "ISIS Sanctuary: June 19, 2015," *Institute for the Study of War*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis-sanctuary-june-19-2015>.

ISIS on Jordan's Borders

The Islamic State now controls territory along the Jordanian border in both Iraq and Syria. The group has a strong presence just north of the tri-border between Jordan, Iraq, and Syria and has also gained control of cities along major land-routes between Jordan and its neighbors to the north.⁵⁵ Even more concerning is the Islamic State's presence near Turaibil, the Kingdom's only truck crossing into Iraq. Since June of 2014 the Islamic State has continued to attack Turaibil, forcing Jordan to close the border on multiple occasions.⁵⁶ Even when the border is open, ISIS checkpoints just north of Turaibil deter most trucks from entering Iraq. As one local driver puts it, "Iraq is closed, Syria is closed, only the Gulf is left."⁵⁷

By blocking trade across Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has greatly disrupted Jordan's ability to export goods in the region. In Iraq, ISIS's capture of Al-Rutba has cut-off one of the Kingdom's most important trade routes. Al-Rutba is situated on Routes 1 & 10, two major highways linking Amman and Baghdad. By capturing Al-Rutba, the Islamic State has effectively cut-off the Kingdom's main access point to Iraq.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "ISIS Sanctuary: June 19, 2015," *Institute for the Study of War*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.understandingwar.org/background/isis-sanctuary-june-19-2015>.

⁵⁶ Asharq Al-Awset Staff, "Jordan's overland trade paralyzed by Iraq, Syria border woes," *Asharq Al-Awset*, April 30, 2015, <http://www.aawsat.net/2015/04/article55343195/jordans-overland-trade-paralyzed-by-iraq-syria-border-woes>.

⁵⁷ Asharq Al-Awset Staff, "Jordan's overland trade paralyzed by Iraq, Syria border woes," *Asharq Al-Awset*, April 30, 2015, <http://www.aawsat.net/2015/04/article55343195/jordans-overland-trade-paralyzed-by-iraq-syria-border-woes>.

⁵⁸ Zvi Bar'el, "King Abdullah struggles to keep a lid on Jordan," *Haaretz*, May 23, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.657678>.

ISIS is not only stopping Jordanian exports from reaching Baghdad, the Islamic State is similarly hindering Jordan's ability to import oil and natural gas.⁵⁹ For Jordan, which imports 95% of its energy, stable fuel supplies are essential to economic growth.⁶⁰ This past June, Jordanian and Iraqi officials were forced to cancel the construction of a pipeline carrying oil into the Kingdom through Iraq's Al-Anbar province. Concerned with the Islamic State's strong presence in Anbar, Jordanian and Iraqi energy officials opted to re-route the pipeline through Saudi Arabia; thus presenting a new set of financial and logistical concerns.⁶¹ To Jordan's south, ISIS affiliate Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis is now threatening Jordan's chief supply of natural gas. Following the removal of President Mubarak in 2011, Egyptian natural gas pipelines underwent repeated attacks; delivering a major blow to Jordan's already struggling economy.⁶² While ISIS affiliated groups have yet to attack Egyptian/Jordanian pipelines, Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis' growing presence in the Sinai remains a major threat to one of Jordan's key energy interests.⁶³

Jordan's economy has taken a hard hit from the loss of regional trade routes. According to Omar Abu-Wishah, the chairman of Jordan's Exporters' Association,

⁵⁹ Middle East Monitor Staff, "Jordan and Iraq change route of oil pipeline due to ISIS," *Middle East Monitor*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/19347-jordan-and-iraq-change-route-of-oil-pipeline-due-to-isis>.

⁶⁰ Kate Galbraith, "Jordan Finds Energy Sources in Unlikely Places," *New York Times*, September 17, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/18/business/energy-environment/jordan-finds-energy-sources-in-unlikely-places.html>

⁶¹ Middle East Monitor Staff, "Jordan and Iraq change route of oil pipeline due to ISIS," *Middle East Monitor*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/19347-jordan-and-iraq-change-route-of-oil-pipeline-due-to-isis>.

⁶² Kate Galbraith, "Jordan Finds Energy Sources in Unlikely Places," *New York Times*, September 17, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/18/business/energy-environment/jordan-finds-energy-sources-in-unlikely-places.html>

⁶³ Yossi Melman, "Analysis: Egypt is losing its war against ISIS in Sinai," *Jerusalem Post*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Analysis-Egypt-is-losing-its-war-against-ISIS-in-Sinai-407822>.

"Jordanian exporters' conditions are worsening by the day, especially after ISIS [gained control of] the city of Ramadi."⁶⁴ Prior to recent conflicts, Iraq and Syria were the two largest buyers of Jordanian agricultural and manufactured goods. Unfortunately, civil war and the rise of the Islamic State have made accessing these markets nearly impossible.⁶⁵ In the case of Jordan's imports, primarily energy, the Islamic State continues to threaten Hashemite interests. ISIS's presence on Jordan's borders has indeed made trade in and out of the Kingdom increasingly difficult for everyone involved.

ISIS Inroads in Jordan

The Islamic State's presence in Iraq and Syria has undoubtedly crippled Jordanian trade, but inside the Kingdom ISIS and its sympathizers pose a more direct threat to the monarchy. According to a poll published in September of 2014 by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, only 62 percent of Jordanians view ISIS as a terrorist organization.⁶⁶ The same poll suggests that 10 percent of the country views the Islamic State positively.⁶⁷ These numbers are concerning for a state already struggling

⁶⁴ Middle East Monitor Staff, "ISIS harms Jordan's commercial ties in region," *Middle East Monitor*, June 1, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/18980-isis-harms-jordans-commercial-ties-in-region>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

⁶⁷ Suha Ma'ayeh, "How Jordan Got Pulled Into the Fight Against ISIS," *Time*, February 26, 2015, <http://time.com/3721793/jordan-fight-against-isis>.

with internal Salafist threats, a stagnant economy, and growing security concerns along its borders.

Jordan's Salafist population has seen a major surge in support since the Arab Spring. Although the Hashemite monarchy survived the opposition movements of 2011, Jordan's King Abdullah continues to feel the threat of local dissidents. Previously operating almost exclusively underground, Jordan's most radical Muslim groups have broadened their base of support by engaging in public demonstrations since the Arab Spring.⁶⁸ Across Jordan, grievances with the monarchy are often expressed alongside Islamist ideology.

The Islamic State and Jabhat Al-Nusra (Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate) have found a base of support in Jordan's Salafist population. While recent disputes between ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra have caused some Jordanians to transfer their sympathies to the Al-Qaeda affiliate, many Jordanian radicals still support the Islamic State; and ISIS's recent territorial gains have only helped to strengthen the group's base of support.⁶⁹ Frustrated and disenfranchised Jordanians are drawn to the Islamic State's image as an effective actor combating regional authoritarians and Western "colonizers."⁷⁰

Attracting supporters through a mix of momentum and propaganda, ISIS has found a strong base of support in Jordan's poorest areas. Economically depressed regions

⁶⁸ Mona Alami, "The New Generation of Jordanian Jihadi Fighters," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 18, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/02/18/new-generation-of-jordanian-jihadi-fighters/h17c>.

⁶⁹ David Schenker, "Preventing ISIS Inroads in Jordan," *Washington Institute*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/preventing-isis-inroads-in-jordan>.

⁷⁰ Simon Cottee, "What Motivates Terrorists?" *The Atlantic*, June 9, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/06/terrorism-isis-motive/395351/>.

like Rusayfa, Zarqa, and Ma'an have become a fertile breeding ground for Jordanian jihadists looking to extend the chaos of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.⁷¹ Support for the Islamic State in the Jordan's most restive areas stands as a testament to the link between the Kingdom's domestic problems and rising levels of Islamic extremism.⁷²



Figure 2: Demonstrators in Ma'an, Jordan display a flag in support of the Islamic State during a protest on June 25, 2014.⁷³

⁷¹ David Schenker, "Countering the ISIS Threat to Jordan," *Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/david-schenker-countering-the-isis-threat-to-jordan-1405290956>.

⁷² Jean Aziz, "Islamic extremism on the rise in Jordan," *Al-Monitor*, May 18, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/05/jordan-fears-syria-war-islamists.html>.

⁷³ William Booth & Taylor Luck, "Jordan fears homegrown ISIS more than invasion from Iraq," *Washington Post*, June 27, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/jordan-fears-homegrown-isis-more-than-invasion-from-iraq/2014/06/27/1534a4ee-f48a-492a-99b3-b6cd3ffe9e41_story.html.

Civil Unrest in Ma'an

While reports of extremist threats continue to pour in from across Jordan, the desert city of Ma'an stands as a particularly challenging area for the King's security forces. Two hundred kilometers south of Amman, Ma'an has become ground zero for confrontation between Jordanian citizens and state police forces. Nicknamed "Jordan's Fallujah," Ma'an is one of the Kingdom's poorest cities and a recent hotbed for Islamic extremism.⁷⁴

Tensions in Ma'an reached an all-time high in April of 2014 when security forces killed twenty-year old Qusai Al-Emam while searching for "dangerous" figures within the city. Highlighting the state's cavalier approach towards policing the city, the death of Qusai Al-Emam sparked a week of violence as buildings were set ablaze and residents clashed with local and state police.⁷⁵ Yet even after the conflict in Ma'an started to settle down, Jordanian security forces maintained their strong presence in the city, acting as a constant reminder of the state's aggressive security apparatus.

In 2014 Security forces killed a total of nine people in Ma'an.⁷⁶ Making matters worse, Ma'an's struggling economy has proven to be of little to no help in alleviating local poverty. Burdened with the highest rate of unemployment in the country, many in

⁷⁴ Steven Simon, "How Vulnerable is Jordan," *Middle East Institute*, August 5, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/how-vulnerable-jordan>.

⁷⁵ Areej Abuqudairi, "Jordan reels from week of violence in Maan," *Al-Jazeera*, April 28, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-reels-from-week-violence-maan-20144281256437277.html>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Ma'an see their city as the epitome of Jordanian state repression and economic neglect.⁷⁷ This sentiment has created an ample breeding ground for Islamic State sympathizers and recruits. Pro-ISIS graffiti can be seen across the city as spray painted walls display phrases like "Welcome to the Islamic State" and "There is no law but god's law." Islamic State flags have also been displayed at local protests, further proving the group's popularity amongst Ma'an's most frustrated citizens.⁷⁸ Following the height of civil unrest in Ma'an, reports claimed that the Islamic State had allocated millions towards recruitment in Jordan.⁷⁹ Whether or not these reports are true, the group does indeed maintain a presence within the Kingdom.

Following the death of Qusai Al-Emam a Jordanian jihadist group calling themselves the "Ma'an Martyrs' Brigade" released a video pledging allegiance to the Islamic State's leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. ISIS has similarly released videos encouraging Jordanians, specifically in Ma'an, to take up arms against their "apostate" regime.⁸⁰ While ISIS affiliates have yet to carry out an attack within Jordan, domestic instability, particularly in Ma'an, has allowed the Islamic State to attract sympathizers amongst the Kingdom's most sullen citizens.

⁷⁷ Steven Simon, "How Vulnerable is Jordan," *Middle East Institute*, August 5, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/how-vulnerable-jordan>.

⁷⁸ Alice Su, "Fade to black: Jordanian city Ma'an copes with Islamic State threat," *Al-Jazeera*, September 2, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/9/2/jordan-maan-daashthreat.html>.

⁷⁹ Taylor Luck, "After success in Iraq and Syria, ISIL will find it tougher to crack Jordan," *The National*, June 19, 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/after-success-in-iraq-and-syria-isil-will-find-it-tougher-to-crack-jordan>.

⁸⁰ Edan Landau, "The Rising Threat in Ma'an, Jordan," *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, June 29, 2014, http://www.ict.org.il/Article/1162/The_Rising_Threat_in_Ma'an_Jordan.

Foreign Fighters Returning Home

Civil unrest and Islamic radicalization in Ma'an illustrates Jordan's value as a recruiting ground for groups like the Islamic State; and many Jordanians have indeed crossed into Iraq and Syria to join militant Islamic groups. However, many of these fighters are now returning home. With the highest per capita rate of foreign fighters in the world, Jordan must now figure out a way to confront the threat of jihadi combatants looking to re-enter the Kingdom.⁸¹ Jordan's chaotic borders and a massive influx of refugees have only exacerbated this problem. It is becoming increasingly difficult to track jihadists returning to Jordan as foreign fighters can easily blend in with the large number of refugees entering the Kingdom from Iraq and Syria.⁸²

While identifying returning foreign fighters has proven difficult enough for Jordanian security forces, deciding what to do with homecoming combatants is becoming equally problematic. In April of 2014 the Jordanian parliament approved a bold set of changes to the state's anti-terrorism laws, expanding the definition of terrorism and vastly increasing the severity of punishments. According to the new laws, anything from encouraging sedition to promoting "terrorist" ideology online is punishable by up to ten years in prison, and even death.⁸³ While Jordan's stern response to radical threats has

⁸¹ Michael Pizzi, "Foreign fighters come home to roost in Jordan" *Al-Jazeera*, June 5, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/5/jordans-foreign-fighters-come-home-to-roost.html>.

⁸² Curtis Ryan, "Security dilemmas and the 'security state' question in Jordan," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, December 29, 2014, <http://pomeps.org/2014/12/29/security-dilemmas-and-the-security-state-question-in-jordan/>.

⁸³ Areej Abuqudairi, "Jordan anti-terrorism law sparks concern," *Al-Jazeera*, April 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-anti-terrorism-law-sparks-concern-201442510452221775.html>.

helped to increase security in the near-term, many believe that the Monarchy's new anti-terrorism laws will prove to be a detriment to state security in the long-term. "You can't arrest people forever," asserts former government minister Nabil Sharif.⁸⁴ Sharif and many other critics of the King's new laws emphasize that combating extremist threats is an "ideological war" and that military solutions and harsh punishments will only help the cause of groups like the Islamic State.⁸⁵

Locking up returning fighters addresses their immediate threat, but many analysts assert that jailing Jordanian combatants will only lead to further levels of radicalization. According to author and former jihadist Abu Hanieh, "prisons are the main incubator for jihad in the Arab world." Many former jihadists returning from Iraq and Syria have indeed become disillusioned with groups like the Islamic State. These young men often return to Jordan in hopes of escaping the violence of the Syrian Civil War; and harsh punishments upon their return only incentivize them to re-radicalize and pursue further violence after their release. Jordan must certainly address the issue of its foreign fighters coming home to roost, but the Kingdom must also be extremely cautious of further radicalizing these men by punishing them too harshly.⁸⁶

Jordan's fear of extremist threats is now playing into the hands of the Islamic State. While Jordan's counterterrorism laws expand the King's ability to address internal dissent, Abdullah's draconian response to Islamist threats may increase radicalization

⁸⁴ Michael Pizzi, "Foreign fighters come home to roost in Jordan" *Al-Jazeera*, June 5, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/5/jordans-foreign-fighters-come-home-to-roost.html>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

within the Kingdom. The inherent “catch twenty-two” of cracking down on terrorist threats has presented a win-win situation for the Islamic State as harsher actions on Jordan’s part will only bolster the appeal of groups like ISIS.

JORDAN’S FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

A volatile mix of domestic instability, extremist threats, and a worldwide economic downturn has left Jordan in a difficult position. The Hashemite Monarchy must now figure out a way to confront the threat of the Islamic State while maintaining the support Jordan’s citizenry. Amidst these challenges, however, Jordan has remained an island of stability in a region plagued by sectarian strife. While the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria continues to pose a major threat to stability in Jordan, embracing political and economic reform within the Kingdom will help combat the group’s appeal. Furthermore, Jordan’s sophisticated security and intelligence apparatus has and will continue to be essential in combating ISIS advances on the ground.

Jordan has carried out military attacks on the Islamic State with relative ease (currently these attacks have been limited to aerial bombings) but the crux of the Kingdom’s assault will be gaining the trust of Sunni tribes in Iraq and the Levant.⁸⁷ If King Abdullah can improve conditions at home and unify Iraq and Syria’s tribal leaders

⁸⁷ David Ignatius, “Jordan leads the world in the fight against extremists,” *The Washington Post*, February 16, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jordan-leads-the-arab-world-in-the-fight-against-extremists/2015/02/16/f0bb86f8-b600-11e4-aa05-1ce812b3fdd2_story.html.

against the Islamic State, the Hashemite Monarchy will stand a strong chance of being able to deter the ISIS threat.

Jordan's Operational Capabilities

Jordan takes its extremist threats very seriously. On average, the Kingdom spends approximately 15% of its annual budget on defense; not to mention the hundreds of millions of dollars Jordan receives in annual military aid, mainly from the U.S.⁸⁸ In response to Islamic State advances last June, King Abdullah immediately increased security in northern Jordan; and the King's ground and air defenses have proven to be more than adequate in maintaining security along Jordan's borders with Iraq and Syria.⁸⁹ Operating across the border, however, has proven to be more of a challenge for the Jordanian Armed Forces.

Jordan's Air Force

King Abdullah continues to assert that he has no plans of entering into a ground war with the Islamic State. Nonetheless, Jordan has pursued an aggressive air campaign against the group since September of 2014.⁹⁰ Kingdom officials claim that Jordanian air strikes have killed over 7,000 ISIS fighters since September while destroying 20% of the

⁸⁸ David Schenker, "Countering the ISIS Threat to Jordan," *Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/david-schenker-countering-the-isis-threat-to-jordan-1405290956>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

group's infrastructure in Iraq and Syria.⁹¹ Yet the success of Jordan's air force has come at the cost of extensive collateral damage in ISIS controlled territory.⁹²

Lacking precision-guided missiles, Jordanian air strikes against the Islamic State have relied largely on the use of "dumb" or unguided bombs. Although effective, these bombs have resulted in large-scale civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria.⁹³ The Islamic State has in turn relied on these civilian casualties to discredit Jordan's air-campaign.⁹⁴ To combat the image of Jordanian forces killing innocent Muslims in the Levant, the King's air force will need to use more precise weapons in its strikes. This is however much easier said than done for a nation already facing major budgetary restraints on the home front.

Jordan's Intelligence Apparatus

Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate has also been very active in the fight against the Islamic State. After Israel, Jordan's intelligence apparatus is considered the best in the region.⁹⁵ Despite its small size, the GID has been very successful in fighting regional terrorist organizations, particularly ISIS's predecessor, Al-Qaeda in Iraq. King

⁹¹ Vasudevan Sridharan, "Jordanian air strikes 'kill 7,000 ISIS fighters' in Iraq and Syria," *International Business Times*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/jordanian-airstrikes-kill-7000-isis-fighters-iraq-syria-1487178>.

⁹² Jonathan Broder, "Jordan Goes All In Against ISIS, but for How Long?" *Newsweek*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/27/jordan-goes-all-against-isis-how-long-306093.html>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot," *Dabiq Issue 7*, February 2015, 5.

⁹⁵ Shane Harris, "The Mouse that Roars," *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/12/the-mouse-that-roars/>.

Abdullah is now relying on the GID to gain support amongst Iraq's Sunni tribes and to gather intelligence on ISIS operations.⁹⁶

Jordan has long maintained good relations with Iraq's Sunni tribal leaders. In 2006 the GID played a key role in the U.S. led "Anbar Awakening," which focused on rallying Sunni tribes against Al-Qaeda to force the group out of Southwestern Iraq.⁹⁷ Success against Al-Qaeda in Al-Anbar province largely relied on Jordanian connections amongst the region's tribal leaders. Jordanian Intelligence is now trying to use these same connections to encourage Iraq's Sunni tribes to take a stand against the Islamic State.⁹⁸ In a region where tribal support often outweighs force, securing the help of Iraq's Sunni leaders is essential to defeating the Islamic State.

Jordan has announced that it plans to help train and arm Sunni tribal units in Iraq.⁹⁹ This task will fall largely on the General Intelligence Directorate. If the GID can successfully train, equip, and support a Sunni uprising in Al-Anbar, it will be difficult for the Islamic State to maintain its presence in southwestern Iraq. Thwarting ISIS from Al-Anbar would also free up previously blocked Jordanian trade routes, bringing back a degree of normalcy to a region plagued by chaos.

⁹⁶ Helene Cooper & Anne Barnard, "Jordan and Emirates Carry Out Airstrikes Against ISIS," *New York Times*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/11/world/middleeast/united-arab-emirates-resume-airstrikes-against-isis.html>.

⁹⁷ Osama Al-Sharif, "Abadi's visit to Jordan focuses on fate of Anbar," *Al-Monitor*, November 4, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/11/iraq-abadi-visit-jordan-anbar-islamic-state.html>.

⁹⁸ Shane Harris, "The Mouse that Roars," *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/12/the-mouse-that-roars/>.

⁹⁹ Osama Al-Sharif, "Jordan to arm Sunni tribes in Iraq, Syria," *Al-Monitor*, January 5, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2015/01/jordan-arming-sunni-tribes-iraq-syria.html>.

Jordan's Anti-Terrorism Laws

In order to effectively combat the ideological appeal of groups like ISIS, Abdullah must address his country's extremist threats in conjuncture with Jordanian law. A legal context for arrests and counterterrorism operations within Jordan would help to legitimize Jordan's war on Islamic extremism. King Abdullah's efforts to maintain stability within the Kingdom have never reached the level of authoritarian repression seen in Syria under Bashar Al-Assad; and in order to prevent Jordan from reaching the same fate as its northern neighbor, Abdullah's coercive apparatus must maintain a strong legal backing to justify the king's actions.

Jordan adopted its first set of anti-terrorism laws in 2006 following a series of suicide attacks that left 57 people dead in Amman.¹⁰⁰ The law defines terrorism as any intentional act meant to disturb national security or threaten Jordanian interests anywhere in the world.¹⁰¹ The law targets active terrorists as well as anyone suspected of funding or supporting terrorist groups. In response to these threats, the 2006 law similarly grants Jordanian authorities the right to monitor, search, and restrict the travel of anyone suspected of engaging in terrorist activities.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Areej Abuqudairi, "Jordan anti-terrorism law sparks concern," *Al-Jazeera*, April 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-anti-terrorism-law-sparks-concern-201442510452221775.html>.

¹⁰¹ "Anti-Terrorism Law No. 55 of year 2006," *Prosecutor General at the State Security Court of Jordan*, November 1, 2006, [https://www.icrc.org/ihl-nat/a24d1cf3344e99934125673e00508142/4d39e76935f76f4fc125767e00320698/\\$FILE/Anti-Terrorism Law.PDF](https://www.icrc.org/ihl-nat/a24d1cf3344e99934125673e00508142/4d39e76935f76f4fc125767e00320698/$FILE/Anti-Terrorism Law.PDF).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

In 2014 the Jordanian Parliament, amidst growing threats from the Islamic State, approved a series of amendments to its 2006 anti-terrorism laws. The new laws expanded the Kingdom's definition of terrorism while drastically increasing punishments for offenders.¹⁰³ According to the amendments, anyone who “disturb[s] the country's relations with foreign states” or “expose[s] Jordan or Jordanians to the danger of acts of aggression” will be prosecuted as a terrorist. The laws similarly target anyone purported of spreading terrorist ideology through media and online sources.¹⁰⁴ Offenders of the new laws are subject to harsh punishments ranging from ten years in prison to death.¹⁰⁵ While Jordan's newest set of anti-terrorism laws grants the king a greater degree of flexibility in suppressing extremist threats, many Jordanians have labeled the draconian laws as overtly repressive.¹⁰⁶ For Jordan, the success of these new laws will hinge on the ability of security forces to distinguish credible threats from peaceful dissent.

Fighting Ideology with Ideology

Countering the ISIS threat hinges on Jordan's ability to combat Islamic radicalization within the Kingdom. In the long-term, Jordan hopes to reduce the appeal

¹⁰³ Areej Abuqudairi, “Jordan anti-terrorism law sparks concern,” *Al-Jazeera*, April 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-anti-terrorism-law-sparks-concern-201442510452221775.html>.

¹⁰⁴ “Law Amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Law as Approved by the Parliament,” *Prosecutor General at the State Security Court of Jordan*, April 2014, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/221134040/Proposed-Amendments-Law-on-Anti-Terrorism-Law-2006-Jordan-scribd>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Areej Abuqudairi, “Jordan anti-terrorism law sparks concern,” *Al-Jazeera*, April 25, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/jordan-anti-terrorism-law-sparks-concern-201442510452221775.html>.

of militant groups like the Islamic State by improving local economic conditions. In the short-term, however, the Hashemite Kingdom is trying to dissuade would-be militants by advertising a different ideology, moderate Islam.¹⁰⁷

State involvement in Islam is nothing new to Jordan, but the Kingdom is now increasing efforts to combat radicalization in lieu of extremist threats like ISIS.¹⁰⁸ “You need to fight ideology with ideology,” asserts General Aref Al-Zaben, commander of the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center in Amman.¹⁰⁹ In Afghanistan, General Zaben took an Imam with him to villages at risk of being controlled by the Taliban. Zaben now wants to use this tactic to combat radical ideology in Jordan.¹¹⁰

The Islamic State’s publication of brutal execution videos has also helped to combat the group’s ideology. While some Muslims continue to defend ISIS brutality, the majority of the Muslim world, and Jordan for that matter, does not condone the group’s barbaric actions.¹¹¹ Jordan is similarly trying to promote “moderate Islam” by broadcasting religious based denunciations of ISIS tactics; most notably a letter published in September of 2014 by 120 prominent Muslim scholars denouncing the behavior of the

¹⁰⁷ Robert Siegel, “Jordan’s Army Preps for a Bigger Role Against ISIS,” *NPR*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/23/388456448/jordans-army-preps-for-a-bigger-role-against-isis>.

¹⁰⁸ William Booth & Taylor Luck, “To counter rise of Islamic State, Jordan imposes rules on Muslim clerics,” *Washington Post*, November 9, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/to-counter-rise-of-the-islamic-state-jordan-imposes-rules-on-muslim-clerics/2014/11/09/4d5fce22-5937-11e4-bd61-346aee66ba29_story.html.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Siegel, “Jordan’s Army Preps for a Bigger Role Against ISIS,” *NPR*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/23/388456448/jordans-army-preps-for-a-bigger-role-against-isis>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Thomas Stackpole, “The Islamic World Versus the Islamic State,” *Foreign Policy*, February 5, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/05/the-islamic-world-versus-the-islamic-state-jordan-pilot-united-nations/>.

Islamic State. By using Islam to legitimize criticisms of the Islamic State, Jordan hopes to portray ISIS ideology as depraved and blasphemous.¹¹²

While Jordan looks to delegitimize ISIS ideology, many in the Kingdom remain skeptical of state involvement in religious life. Jordan's Ministry of Islamic Affairs is now demanding that Muslim clerics refrain from slandering King Abdullah or from issuing statements supporting extremist thought.¹¹³ These restrictions have also been accompanied by a list of suggested topics for Friday sermons. While state oversight of religious activity has long been commonplace in Jordan, an open attempt to dictate rhetoric is something new.¹¹⁴ "Clerics are our ground forces against extremists," asserts one Jordanian religious official.¹¹⁵ Jordan must undoubtedly take a proactive stance against its extremist threats, but the Kingdom must also remain wary of appearing overly imposing on religious life. Finding a balance between the two will be essential to the success of Jordan's ideological campaign against the Islamic State.

Jordan, ISIS, and the Conflict's Regional Impact

While King Abdullah has worked tirelessly to combat extremist threats within Jordan, the Kingdom's battle against the Islamic State has affected the entire region.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ William Booth & Taylor Luck, "To counter rise of Islamic State, Jordan imposes rules on Muslim clerics," *Washington Post*, November 9, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/to-counter-rise-of-the-islamic-state-jordan-imposes-rules-on-muslim-clerics/2014/11/09/4d5fce22-5937-11e4-bd61-346aee66ba29_story.html.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Amidst rising instability across the Middle East, Jordan has strengthened ties with its neighbors, particularly Israel and Egypt. Jordan's neighbors are keenly aware that instability in the Hashemite Kingdom will only exacerbate threats along their own borders. Consequently, both Jerusalem and Cairo hold a major stake in Jordan's fight against ISIS.¹¹⁶

Amidst the rising threat of the Islamic State, Israel has supplied the Jordanian Armed Forces with valuable intelligence and drone support over ISIS controlled territory.¹¹⁷ Israel, like Jordan, is well aware that extremist ideology can easily penetrate international borders. While ISIS affiliated groups have already launched attacks on Israel from Gaza, the group has yet to establish a major presence in the West Bank. With intelligence assets across the region, Jordan can greatly bolster Jerusalem's operational capabilities when it comes to preventing ISIS inroads within Israeli territory.¹¹⁸

In the Sinai, Egypt has established a two-kilometer wide "security zone" along the Gaza Strip; largely in response to ISIS's growing regional threat. The "security zone" greatly reduces the ability of radical groups to smuggle weapons into Israeli controlled Gaza.¹¹⁹ Yet Egypt's efforts to better police its border with Israel have done little to maintain stability in the rest of the Sinai, which remains highly vulnerable to extremist threats. ISIS's Sinai affiliate, Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis has taken advantage of Egypt's

¹¹⁶ Amos Harel, "ISIS Threat Brings Jordan and Egypt Closer to Israel," *Haaretz*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/premium-1.641497>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Elise Labott and Jeremy Diamond, "Israel Bolsters Ties to Jordan as ISIS Looms," *CNN*, February 6, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/06/politics/israel-jordan-relationship-strengthened-isis/>.

¹¹⁹ Amos Harel, "ISIS Threat Brings Jordan and Egypt Closer to Israel," *Haaretz*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/premium-1.641497>.

political instability, carrying out dozens of deadly attacks in recent months.¹²⁰ Indeed, reducing ISIS's grip on the Sinai will require a much larger military effort on the part of the Egyptian Armed Forces.

Jordan, Israel, and Egypt share a common interest in defeating the radical threat of the Islamic State. As ISIS affiliate groups have moved into Gaza and the Sinai, both Israel and Egypt have become increasingly open to working with neighboring forces. In Israel, joint efforts between Jerusalem and Amman to counter ISIS advances have taken the spotlight off of long-standing tensions on the Hashemite controlled Temple Mount.¹²¹ Amidst growing regional instability, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt are putting smaller grievances aside to confront the larger threat of ISIS. This recent surge in cooperation has provided an essential boost for Jordan in its fight against the Islamic State.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has set its sights on Jordan as the group's next target; but that does not mean that the Hashemite Kingdom will suffer the same fate as its northern neighbors. In a region plagued by political turmoil, Jordan has long been able to maintain stability and protect its borders. In response to the Arab Spring, the Kingdom pioneered a "third way," avoiding regime failure with a careful mix of reform and

¹²⁰ Yossi Melman, "Analysis: Egypt is losing its war against ISIS in Sinai," *Jerusalem Post*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Analysis-Egypt-is-losing-its-war-against-ISIS-in-Sinai-407822>.

¹²¹ Amos Harel, "ISIS Threat Brings Jordan and Egypt Closer to Israel," *Haaretz*, February 9, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.641497>.

repressive action.¹²² King Abdullah now plans on using this same spirit of resilience to counter the threat of the Islamic State.

Yet resilience is easier said than done. Jordan's long list of domestic problems and authoritarian abuses has made the Kingdom an easy target for ISIS ideologues. The Islamic State's ideological attack, however, can work both ways. If Jordan can figure out a way to curb its growing economic problems while making its security apparatus appear less obtrusive, the Hashemite Monarchy can delegitimize ISIS ideology with stability and solidarity on the home front. To achieve this goal the Kingdom must pursue reform over armed action.¹²³

While Jordan has and will continue to pursue military action against the Islamic State, reducing the appeal of ISIS ideology is essential to defeating the group. The Islamic State thrives on discrediting leaders like King Abdullah of Jordan. If Abdullah can maintain stability and improve conditions within the Kingdom, ISIS's momentum will not only be halted in Jordan, the group's appeal will suffer across the region.

¹²² Curtis Ryan, "Security dilemmas and the 'security state' question in Jordan," *Project on Middle East Political Science*, December 29, 2014, <http://pomeps.org/2014/12/29/security-dilemmas-and-the-security-state-question-in-jordan/>.

¹²³ Suha Ma'ayeh, "How Jordan Got Pulled Into the Fight Against ISIS," *Time*, February 26, 2015, <http://time.com/3721793/jordan-fight-against-isis>.

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