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*Victoria Silva Sánchez\**

Lights and shadows of Jordan's  
counterterrorism strategy?

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## *Lights and shadows of Jordan's counterterrorism strategy?*

### *Abstract:*

*Jordan is one of the countries with the highest number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. It is also one of the world leaders in the fight against terrorism and extremism. But, what is the Jordanian strategy to counter these? The reality is that there is no such coordinated approach to address these issues. Instead, the Jordanian approach is overwhelmingly reactive and securitarian. As a result, focus is put on the dismantling of terrorist cells and the prevention of attacks in the country as well as the containment of violence outside of the Jordanian territory. At the same time, it has had negative effects on social cohesion and the narrowing of the fundamental rights and freedoms for its citizens. Besides, not addressing the root causes behind extremism has not provided a solution to addressing for the continuous flow of young Jordanians towards extremist groups. The Jordanian counter-terrorist strategy casts more shadows than light.*

### *Keywords:*

*Jordan, Middle East, security, extremism, terrorism, jihadism, counter-terrorism.*

\*NOTE: The ideas contained in this Opinion Document shall be responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

## Introduction: assessment of the terrorist threat in Jordan

Jordan has been a usual target of political violence, especially in the beginning of the 1970s, when Palestinian guerrillas grew in strength within the Jordanian territory, threatening the very own existence of the Hashemite monarchy.

The disruption of Palestinian movements brought with it the expansion of salafism. Under the leadership of sheikh Naseruddin al-Albani, conservative salafism expanded its influence in Jordan during the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> This movement's strategy is based in the rectification of beliefs and community values with the objective of returning to a truly Islamic behaviour, according to the movement's ideological understanding of the former.<sup>2</sup> In this way, conservative salafists oppose Muslim Brothers, on the one hand, and jihadi salafism, on the other hand; a fact which has led to a «marriage of interest» with Jordanian authorities.<sup>3</sup> This special relationship has been used both by the State and the conservative salafists with the aim of weakening the influence of other political and religious movements at the same time that conservative salafists enjoy great freedom of action to carry out their activities in places such as mosques, schools and universities, among others.<sup>4</sup>

The 1990s saw the emergence of jihadi salafism when three fundamental factors converged: first, the return of the *mujahedeen* that had participated in the Afghan conflict; second, the 1991 Gulf War; and third, the return of over 300,000 Jordanians from Kuwait and other Gulf countries as a consequence of the Jordanian position towards the United States' invasion of Iraq. Many of these returnees had been indoctrinated in jihadi salafism ideas.<sup>5</sup> Jihadi salafism used, for its own benefit, the discontent of Jordanian fighters returned from Afghanistan. Many of these fighters had participated in the conflict for economic opportunism and not because of religious ideology, and found it impossible to reintegrate into Jordanian society.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Abu Rumman, M. y Abu Hanieh, H., *The "Islamic Solution" in Jordan. Islamists, the State and the Ventures of Democracy and Security*. Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013: 246.

2 *Ibidem*: 246.

3 *Ibid.* 247.

4 *Ibid.* 248.

5 *Ibid.* 330.

6 International Crisis Group, "Jordan's 9/11: Dealing with Jihadi Islamism". Middle East Report 47, 2005: 3.

Despite the small size of the country, most of recent jihadi salafi leaders have been Jordanian: from Abdullah Azzam to Sami al-Aradi, passing through Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qutada al-Filistini and, last but not least, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. These names are behind the spread and growing of the jihadi salafi movement in Jordan in cities such as Ma'an, Ma'fraq, Salt, Zarqa or Irbid.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the 2000s, the Jordanian jihadi movement became greatly divided due to the infiltration of Jordanian security forces among their ranks. This division increased after the attacks against three hotels in Amman on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 2005 and due to the consequent Jordanian victims they caused.<sup>8</sup> Al Maqdisi became the only leader of jihadi salafism in Jordan after the death of Al-Zarqawi in Irak in June 2006<sup>9</sup>, and currently he leads the branch follower of Al-Qaeda, together with other salafist leaders such as Abu Sayyaf. On the other side, followers of Daesh (whom al-Shishani labels as «Neo-Zarqawists»<sup>10</sup>) are numbered around 2,000.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of 2015, after the murder of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh by Daesh, Al-Maqdisi was freed from his imprisonment and he granted an interview to the Jordanian television where he labelled Daesh as «deviated», something that many regarded as a strategy by the Jordanian regime.<sup>12</sup>

Jordan is one of the countries with the highest number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, although it is impossible to estimate the exact figures.<sup>13</sup> For instance, at the end of 2015 the number of Jordanian foreign fighters was estimated at 2,000<sup>14</sup>, which placed

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7 Abu Rumman, M. y Abu Hanieh, H., *The "Islamic Solution"...* op. cit., 336.

8 International Crisis Group, "Jordan's 9/11...", op. cit., 11.

9 Abu Rumman, M. y Abu Hanieh, H., *The "Islamic Solution"...*, op. cit., 354.

10 Al-Shishani, M., "Salafi Jihadis in Jordan and the effects of the conflict in Syria", en *The rise of religious radicalism in the Arab world: significance, implications and counter-strategies*, Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015, 60-66.

11 Al Sharif, O., "Jordan and the challenge of Salafi Jihadists", *Middle East Institute*, 21/03/2016 [21/08/2018]. Available at <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/jordan-and-challenge-salafi-jihadists>

12 Silva Sánchez, V., "Al-Maqdisi, el hombre detrás del extremismo jordano", *Baab al Shams*, 05/12/2016 [21/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.baabalshams.org/al-maqdisi-el-hombre-detras-del-extremismo-jordano/>

13 To assess the dimension of homegrown extremism in Jordan, see Silva Sánchez, V., "Desafíos para Jordania en 2017: un futuro incierto", Documento de Opinión 54/2017, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 18/05/2017. Available at [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2017/DIEEO54-2017\\_Jordania\\_2017\\_VictoriaSilva.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEO54-2017_Jordania_2017_VictoriaSilva.pdf)

14 Counter Extremism Project, "Jordan: Extremism & Counter-Extremism", 2017. Available at <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/jordan>

the country as the world leader in number of foreign fighters per capita with 315 per each million inhabitants.<sup>15</sup> By the beginning of 2017, a report by the US Congressional Research Service reckoned the figure to be at 4,000 fighters.<sup>16</sup> In addition, followers and supporters of extremist groups were estimated between 9,000 and 10,000.<sup>17</sup> Professors Muhammad Abu Rumman and Musa Stheiwi, from the Center of Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan, have studied the cases of 732 Jordanian inmates charged on crimes of terrorism and extremism. Their findings show that the majority are workers (71.2 percent) of the private sector (78.4 percent). Geographically, 40.7 percent are originating from Zarqa, followed by Irbid (17.4 percent), Balqa (13 percent), Amman (12 percent) and Ma'an (9.3 percent). 25 percent of the cases studied would have fallen in combat while 68.6 percent are located in Jordanian territory. Moreover, Daesh is in the lead when it comes to the recruitment of Jordanian extremists with 36.4 percent (figures go up to almost 50 percent among those aged under 22 years old), followed by other *takfiri* extremist groups with 31 percent, and al-Nusra Front with 24.9 percent.<sup>18</sup>

### **The main features of Jordanian counterterrorist strategy**

Jordanian counterterrorist strategy has been internationally praised. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has highlighted in several occasions «the Jordanian approach in the prevention of radicalization and the fight against terrorism».<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the reality is that there is no strategy as such.

The evolution of the counterterrorist approach has gone hand in hand with the evolution of the threat, which has been marked by a series of events taking place during the last decades:

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<sup>15</sup> *Radio Free Europe*, "Foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq", 2015 [25/08/2018]. Disponible en <https://www.rferl.org/a/foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-is-isis-isil-infographic/26584940.html>

<sup>16</sup> Sharp, J., "Jordan: background & U.S. Relations", Congressional Research Service, 2017, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Counter Extremism Project, "Jordan: Extremism...", *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Abu Rumman, M. Y Stheiwi, M., *Sociología al-Tatarraf w' al-Irhab fi al-Urdun* (Sociología del extremismo y el terrorismo en Jordania). Amán: Universidad de Jordania, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Silva Sánchez, Victoria, "Jordania y la UE comparten posturas en las crisis de Siria y Qatar", *Aquí Europa*, 10/07/2017 [20/08/2018]. Disponible en <http://www.aquieuropa.com/noticia/63530-jordania-y-la-ue-comparten-posturas-en-las-crisis-de-siria-y-qatar>

- The Persian Gulf War: it marked the beginning of the expansion of jihadi salafism in Jordan.
- The 11th September 2001: it resulted in the increase of the chase of jihadi militants by the security forces, with the former fleeing to Afghanistan.
- The Iraq War in 2003: it marked the start of the open confrontation between the State and the jihadi militants, with 22 cases before the courts between 2003 and 2008. The 2005 Amman attacks marked a turning point in the Jordanian counterterrorist policy, with the promulgation of the anti-terrorist law.
- The conflict in Syria: it has transformed Jordan's security policy due to the establishment of a double battlefield: the external one in the borders with Syria and Iraq, aimed at preventing the infiltration of jihadi elements in the country; and the internal one, with a growing amount of sleeper cells in different cities in the country, with the city of Irbid, close to the Syrian border, gaining importance in this regard. As well, protests resulted in clashes between the police and jihadi militants in the city of Zarqa in April 2011. These clashes were followed by a detention campaign which pushed many of those militants to be recruited by the different armed groups that were starting to operate in Syria. Another turning point was the killing of Jordanian pilot Muath Kasasbeh by Daesh in January 2015.

In previous years, the Jordanian government has taken some steps aimed at implementing a strategy to counter terrorism and violent extremism. In spite of that, Jordanian authorities have not developed a national framework yet which addresses all its aspects and dimensions as well as organizes the different actors and stakeholders involved in the implementation of such strategy. Rather, the current strategy is an approach which progresses against the clock, depending on the situations that come up and the interests of the main international donors and allies.

The core elements upon which the Jordanian approach in the fight against terrorism and extremism builds up itself are the following:

- The 2014 anti-terrorist law: this law amends the previous one dating from 2006. Article 2 of the law stipulates the definition of terrorism.<sup>20</sup> This definition is extremely wide as

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<sup>20</sup> Jordan, Anti-Terrorist Law, N° 55 de 2006. Amended in 2014, Article 2

to encompass acts whose terrorist nature can be called into question. Article 3 lists the acts considered as terrorism, including crimes of non-terrorist nature such as damaging the State's relations with other countries, establishing charities that can be used as a smokescreen for terrorists groups, the use of information systems to support terrorists groups or promoting their ideas, attempting against the Royal family members, incitement of armed rebellions against the constitutional order or establishing a criminal organization.<sup>21</sup> Finally, article 4 establishes the punishments for the perpetration of such crimes, including death penalty for those which outcome is the loss of human lives. In the remainder of the cases, sentences rang between ten years and life imprisonment with the loss of human lives being a differential factor. As well, the law establishes punishments for the accomplices of any terrorist crime of the same degree as those of the sentenced, independently of the kind of involvement.<sup>22</sup>

- The cybercrime law: this law addresses electronic crimes such as piracy, electronic scam, child pornography, online promotion and funding of terrorism, as well as the access to sensitive information that can put national security at risk.<sup>23</sup> However, many have criticized the governmental abuse of this law in order to weaken freedom of expression and prosecuting journalists and media outlets, with special attention to article 11 of the legal text.<sup>24</sup> The last amendment of this law took place in May 2018 with the aim of strengthening the punishments for crimes against online privacy, harassment, blackmailing and to counter online hate speech. At the same time, the amendment has made easier for the victims to report and prosecute these crimes.<sup>25</sup>
- The Amman Message: a declaration that seeks to rectify the image of Islam and to express the position of religion towards contemporary issues, especially terrorism. It was pushed by King Abdullah II and was related to the Declaration of the three points,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem.*, Article 3

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem.*, Article 4

<sup>23</sup> Jordan, Information Systems and Cyber Crime Law, 2010. Available at [https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/information-systems-crime-law\\_html/Jordan\\_Information\\_Systems\\_and\\_Cyber\\_Crime\\_Law.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/information-systems-crime-law_html/Jordan_Information_Systems_and_Cyber_Crime_Law.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Nahhas, R., "Jordan's Cyber-Crime law: a double-edged sword", *The Arab Weekly*, 13/11/2016 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://thearabweekly.com/jordans-cyber-crime-law-double-edged-sword>

<sup>25</sup> *The Jordan Times*, "Gov't ready with cybercrime bill 'to curb hate speech'", 22/05/2018 [25/08/2018]. Available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/gov%E2%80%99t-ready-cybercrime-bill-curb-hate-speech%E2%80%99>

signed by 300 Islamic scholars during an international forum complementary to the message that took place in Amman in 2005. The Declaration of the three points defined who is a Muslim, if excommunication is allowed in Islam, as well as stipulations relative to the issuing of religious edict (*fatawa*).

- International treaties and conventions: Jordan is part and has implemented the chief international treaties and conventions governing the fight against terrorism on a global level, including the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 (1999), 2199 (2015), 1373 (2001), 1540 (2004) and 1624 (2005) as well as the Convention of the Islamic Conference on Combating Terrorism (1999) and Action Plan (2002) and the Arab League's Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (1998). Jordan also takes part in the Financial Action Task Force in the MENA region, having amended its Law n. 46 (2007) against money-laundering.

### **Counterterrorist policy**

After the attacks that took place in Amman in 2005, Jordanian counterterrorist forces have gone through a process of capacity building, characterized by the increase of international funding and the establishment of new programmes based to a great extent on the cooperation with counterterrorist forces of other countries. This has allowed the detection and arrest of several suspects of terrorism and their indictment.

### **Security forces**

The Jordanian security architecture is placed under the direct control of the monarch and is composed by the national police (named Public Security Directorate), the State Security Court, the Armed Forces and the intelligence services (General Intelligence Directorate (GID), also known as *mukhabarat*). The main characteristic of this system is that it is built around one institution: the intelligence services. They are in charge of everything related to terrorism and national security and are tasked with defining the Jordanian counterterrorist policy. Some of the organizations and terrorist complots disrupted by the GID include the Mohammad Army (1989), Bay'at Al-Imam Organization (1994), Reform and Defiance Movement (1998), Khader Abu Hoshier (1999), Jund-el-Sham (2000),

Jordanian Afghans (2001), Al-Jayousi Group's explosive-laden trucks (2004), and the attempt against Queen Alia International Airport (2006). According to the institution, the Jordanian fight against terrorism is based in a three-step plan: strengthening of legislation, implementation of executive measures, and compliance with international treaties and conventions.<sup>26</sup>

Due to its securitarian approach, a shift has taken place regarding the way the different Islamist groups in the country are addressed in the last years. This has resulted in the persecution of the Muslim Brothers, despite their pro-regime stance, resulting in the radicalization and recruitment of some of its members by extremist groups operating in Syria.<sup>27</sup> Besides, the GID « does not constitute *per se* a law enforcement agency, and therefore holds no power of arrest or detention». However, many organizations have reported human rights violations of arrested persons in the organizations' facilities.<sup>28</sup>

On another side, the Armed Forces are in charge of external security, mainly of the borders with Iraq and Syria. During the years of conflict, the Armed Forces have been the target of several attacks presumably carried out by Daesh and other extremist groups which held territory in areas close to the border, causing several casualties among the military.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the Jordanian Army takes part in the international coalition against Daesh from the air, although this participation has decreased with the time, notably after the capture and execution of the Jordanian pilot Muath Kasasbeh by the aforementioned extremist group in January 2015.

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<sup>26</sup> General Intelligence Department, "Countering Terrorism", no date [30/09/2018]. Available at <https://gid.gov.jo/topics-views/countering-terrorism/>

<sup>27</sup> Milton-Edwards, B., "Grappling with Islamism: assessing Jordan's evolving approach", Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper n° 19, Sept. 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Karama Foundation, "JORDAN: Shadow report. Report submitted to the Human Rights Committee in the context of the review of the fifth periodic report of Jordan", 18/09/2017 [30/09/2018]. Available at [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/JOR/INT\\_CCPR\\_NGO\\_JOR\\_28931\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/JOR/INT_CCPR_NGO_JOR_28931_E.pdf);

<sup>29</sup> For more information, see Yubero Parro, B., "Los retos de Jordania: seguridad en la frontera norte y estabilidad económica", Documento de Opinión 100/2017, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 02/10/2017. Available at [http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2017/DIEEEO100-2017\\_Retos\\_Jordania\\_BeatrizYubero.pdf](http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEEO100-2017_Retos_Jordania_BeatrizYubero.pdf)

Date	Location	Casualties	Arrests	Perpetrator	Comments
23rd October 2018	Madaba	1 dead	1 (non confirmed)	Takfiri extremist	General Habes al-Hanini, former director of the Jordanian counterterrorist division
11th August 2018	Salt	6 dead	5	Daesh (presumably)	
10th August 2018	Fuheis	1 dead	0	Daesh (presumably)	
2nd August 2018	Syrian border	Undetermined number of deaths	0	Daesh	
8th January 2018	Amman	0	17	Daesh	Disruption of a cell that was planning attacks against several targets
August 2017	Syrian border	0	0	Unknown	
3rd June 2017	Palmyra district	3 dead and 1 injured	0	Unknown	
15th February 2017	Amán	1 dead	0	Unknown	

18th December 2016	Karak	14 dead and 29 injured	0	Daesh	
18th December 2016	Qatraneh	2 injured	0	Daesh	
4th November 2016	Jafr	3 dead and 1 injured	0	Muslim extremists	
16th October 2016	Rukban	4 dead and 20 injured	0	Daesh	
25th September 2016	Amman	1 dead (cartoonist Nahed Hattar)	1	Daesh (Presumably)	
21st June 2016	Ar- Ruwayshid	8 dead and 13 injured	0	Daesh	
6th June 2016	Ayn al Basha	5 dead	1	Daesh (Presumably)	
2nd March 2016	Irbid	8 dead and 5 injured	13	Daesh	
12th February 2016	Wadi Abu Khasharef	0	0	Unknown	
9th November 2015	Muwaqqar	6 dead and 7 injured	0	Daesh	The perpetrator was a police officer

21st September 2015	Unknown	0	0	Unknown	
25th June 2015	Ramtha	1 dead and 4 injured	0	Southern Front	
3rd August 2014	Ma'an	1 dead	0	Unknown	
15th February 2014	Unknown	7 soldiers injured	0	Unknown	

**Table 1. Terrorists attacks in Jordan between 2014 and 2018**

Prepared by the author. Sources: Counter Extremism Project, The Global Terrorism Database, ACLED Data Project, several media outlets.<sup>30</sup>

### ***The judicial system***

Another key institution is the State Security Court, a military-like court with competences to judge on matters that affect national security, including high treason, espionage, drug trafficking and terrorism.<sup>31</sup> Trials for belonging to terrorist organizations are numerous. In 2018, several dozens of people have been sentenced. An example is the trial of 17 suspects of planning attacks in November 2017. Another example is a 27-year old man

<sup>30</sup> Frantzman, S, "Former Jordanian Counterterrorism chief killed in Jordan", *The Jerusalem Post*, 24/10/2018 [26/10/2018]. Available at <https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Former-Jordanian-counterterrorism-chief-killed-in-Jordan-570168>; *Haaretz*, "Jordan says it foiled large-scale ISIS attack on shopping malls, security installations", 08/01/2018 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/jordan/jordan-says-it-foiled-large-scale-isis-attack-1.5729748>; *Al Jazeera*, "Jordan Army says several ISIL fighters killed in border clash", 02/08/2018 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/jordan-army-isil-fighters-killed-border-clashes-180802135231069.html>; *Al Jazeera*, "Gunman kills five at Jordan police training centre", 10/11/2015 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/americans-killed-jordanian-training-centre-151109123305161.html>; *The Times of Israel*, "3 gunmen from Syria killed in Jordan border attack", 03/06/2017 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/3-gunmen-from-syria-killed-in-jordan-border-attack/>;

<sup>31</sup> US Embassy in Jordan, "Jordanian Legal System", no date [30/09/2018]. Available at <https://jo.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/attorneys/jordanian-legal-system/>

charged of attacking security forces, whose 20-year sentence was commuted due to his age. In general terms, sentences rang between four and fifteen years of imprisonment plus penal labour for those charged of belonging to a terrorist organization, committing terrorist acts or promoting terrorist ideology. For instance, in September 2018, a man was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for promotion of terrorist ideology while another member of a group of six was sentenced to death, while the other members of the group were sentenced to fifteen years plus penal labour on charges of planning terrorist attacks.<sup>32</sup>

This court has not only prosecuted suspects of terrorism and extremism related crimes, but also professors, activists, journalists and political leaders for expressing opinions or criticism on the government's performance.<sup>33</sup> This authoritarian drift can be explained in a context where this court is structurally dependent on the intelligence services, by virtue of its prosecutors and investigators who bring the evidence to court upon which the sentence is made. This has resulted in an international denounce of this judicial institution due to the surpassing of its competences and to the fact that it judges civilians for crimes outside its scope and competences.<sup>34</sup> This court lacks impartiality since the judges are appointed by the Prime Minister, neglecting the principle of the separation of powers. Many bodies, including the United Nations Human Rights Committee have asked for the abolition of this court. As Milton-Edwards states, «Jordan has become a highly restrictive environment with critics of the regime being surveilled, harassed, charged in security courts, and imprisoned by the state».<sup>35</sup> As well, the outcome of the conservative

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<sup>32</sup> *The Jordan Times*, "Defendants in major terror trial plead not guilty", 02/04/2018 [30/09/2018]. Available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/defendants-major-terror-trial-plead-not-guilty>; *The Jordan Times*, "Court sentences Daesh-affiliated suspects", 12/09/2018 [30/09/2018]. Available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/court-sentences-daesh-affiliated-suspects>; Husseini, R., "State Security Court announces sentences for several terror suspects", *The Jordan Times*, 06/09/2018 [30/09/2018]. Available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/state-security-court-announces-sentences-several-terror-suspects>; *Arab News*, "Jordan sentences man to death over Daesh affiliation", 14/05/2018 [30/09/2018]. Available at <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1302716/middle-east>

<sup>33</sup> For more information on the situation of freedom of expression in Jordan, see Freedom House, "Freedom of the World 2018, Jordan", 2018 [28/09/2018]. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/jordan>; Freedom House, "Freedom on the Net 2017. Jordan Country Profile", 2017 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/jordan>

<sup>34</sup> Milton-Edwards, B., "Grappling with Islamism: assessing Jordan's evolving approach", Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper n° 19, Sept. 2017: 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem.*: 18.

legislation developed during the previous years has been the end of the eight-year moratorium on death penalty executions. Many of those charged with the crimes gathered in the above table have been executed during the last three years.

### ***De-radicalization and foreign fighters***

Regarding de-radicalization policy, Jordan has implemented a prison-based religious program, seeking to bring back the inmates to a moderate Islam and a more traditional belief. The program is based on the needs of each individual and includes basic literacy, employment advice and theological training.<sup>36</sup> However, it is very difficult to evaluate this program due to the lack of public information about it, regarding number of participants, criteria for selection, methodology, results and impact on the community.<sup>37</sup>

According to Deeb et al., there is no national strategy aimed at encouraging the return of Jordanian foreign fighters abroad.<sup>38</sup> This can be observed by the treatment given to returned combatants. In general terms, the return of Jordanian fighters from Syria and Iraq is not encouraged. Most of those who have managed to come back have been sentenced to long imprisonments, in high security prisons and isolated from their families.<sup>39</sup>

## **Prevention of violent extremism**

### ***Political and institutional level***

In May 2016, the Jordanian Ministry of Interior and the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP) signed a memorandum of understanding in order to establish a partnership to prevent violent extremism through the development of a National Strategy.

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<sup>36</sup> The Soufan Group, Jordan's Counterterrorism Program, TSG IntelBriefs, 2013 [21/08/2018]. Available at <http://www.soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbriefs-jordans-counterterrorism-program/>

<sup>37</sup> Deeb, G.; Woodham, J.; Chin, M.; Gharaibeh, S., "A national strategic framework for countering violent extremism in Jordan", *Columbia Journal of International Affairs*, 2016 [20/08/2018]. Available at <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/national-strategic-framework-countering-violent-extremism-jordan>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> Gardner, F., (2015) "Inside Jordan's fight against home-grown extremism", *BBC*, 26/05/2015 [25/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32782439>

This project has been funded by the Japanese Government and is still ongoing but none of the contents or programs has been made public.<sup>40</sup> In January 2017, General Omari Sharif, director of counter-extremism and violence program at the Ministry of Culture, declared that the strategy would be ready for the following month<sup>41</sup>, but nothing has been published until this date. Some elements of this strategy are the Directorate to Fight Extremism and Violence, which has been recently moved to the Prime Minister Office, as well as the Peace Community Centre. To Saud al-Sharafat, former Brig. Gen in the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate, these institutions lack resources and real power.<sup>42</sup> Also, in 2017 the Jordanian Centre for the Prevention of Extremist Ideology was established in Zarqa, funded by the Japanese and American governments. The centre aims to support research and training of Jordanian officials in extremist ideology. Al-Sharafat notes that this strategy has suffered from «a weak understanding of the causes and pathways of extremism» and has failed to create solid links between the participating institutions.<sup>43</sup>

Jordan has taken the lead in several international initiatives aimed at countering and preventing violent extremism, portraying the country as one of the world leaders in this domain. In 2011, Jordan was one of the 30 countries founders of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), an informal and multilateral platform aimed at addressing violent extremist ideologies and the terrorist threat by promoting a strategic and long-term approach in accordance with the countries' urgent needs.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Jordan proposed a resolution to the UN Security Council on the contribution of youth to the prevention of violent extremism and the resolution of conflicts.<sup>45</sup> Resolution 2250 was unanimously

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<sup>40</sup> UNDP Jordan, "National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan (P/CVE)", 17/05/2016 [21/08/2018]. Available at

<http://www.jo.undp.org/content/jordan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/05/17/national-strategy-on-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-in-jordan-p-cve-.html>

<sup>41</sup> Malkawi, K., "Anti-extremism strategy to be ready next month", *The Jordan Times*, 26/01/2017 [21/08/2018]. Available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/anti-extremism-strategy-be-ready-next-month>

<sup>42</sup> Al-Sharafat, S., "Assesing Jordan's National Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism", Fikra Forum, Whashington Institute, 10/08/2018 [29/09/2018]. Available at

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/assessing-jordans-national-strategy-to-combat-violent-extremism>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, 2018 [30/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.thegctf.org>

<sup>45</sup> United Nations, "Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2250 (2015), Urges Member States

adopted on 9 December, 2015 and has been present in the discourse of Jordanian authorities, especially of the Crown Prince Hussein in his address to the UN General Assembly on 22 September, 2017.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Jordan co-chairs with Norway the Group of Friends of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE); an initiative launched in New York in September 2017, composed of 40 UN Member States and the European Union with the aim of promoting a comprehensive approach to confront terrorism and violent extremism that addresses the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Religious level***

On the religious realm, in November 2004, Jordan launched the aforementioned Amman Message, which has become the basis of moderated religious discourse of the Kingdom. The Message constitutes an alternative narrative about Islam as a faith and as social values, a message of tolerance «which is under attack».<sup>48</sup> The document places the Jordanian effort to promote true Islam in a historical tradition undertaken by all Hashemite monarchs: an Islam based in providing a common ground among different peoples and faiths, the opposition to discrimination, tolerance, forgiveness, respecting for property, balance, moderation, equanimity and the sacred value of human life.<sup>49</sup> The message also rejects extremism as a «deviation from true faith and a form of injustice» and terrorism «wherever it comes from» while at the same time denouncing the «campaign that portrays Islam as a religion that encourages violence and institutionalizes terrorism».<sup>50</sup>

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to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels”, 09/12/2015 [21/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

<sup>46</sup> His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II, “Crown Prince delivers Jordan’s address at the UN General Assembly” 22/09/2017 [21/08/2018]. Available at <http://www.alhussein.jo/en/media/press-releases/crown-prince-delivers-jordan%E2%80%99s-address-un-general-assembly>

<sup>47</sup> Norway in the UN, “Group of Friends of Preventing Violent Extremism”, 28/09/2017 [21/08/2018]. Available at <https://www.norway.no/en/missions/un/news/news-from-norwayun/PVE/>

<sup>48</sup> Al-Khatib Al-Tamimi, I. E., “Amman Message”, Amman: Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places, 2004: 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*: 2-4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 5-6.

Other initiatives are the Global Forum for Moderation, which aims to promote a moderate character of Islam and has branches in different countries,<sup>51</sup> and the World Interfaith Harmony Week, proposed by King Abdullah II at the UN General Assembly in 2010, being adopted on October that year. The first Harmony Week took place in February 2011. It is a platform where all interfaith groups and other groups of goodwill organize events together to engage in dialogue based in the common fundamental religious commandments.<sup>52</sup>

The Ministry of Religious Affairs has carried out several initiatives aimed at promoting the official religious discourse by progressively putting religious personnel under its direct control, as well as controlling sermons, guidance, preaching, and mosques in order to ensure compliance with the state's religious discourse. In addition, since 2016, it has encouraged the celebration of sessions in the communities to refuse extremist Islamist ideologies by female preachers.<sup>53</sup> This has resulted in a «monopoly of the the legitimacy of speaking in the name of Islam» by the Ministry, which is contested by different Islamist actors.<sup>54</sup>

### **Media level**

The media realm is highly important since Jordanian public opinion tends to not consider certain extremist groups as such. For instance, Hamas and Hizbullah were considered as legitimate resistance groups by 73.5 percent and 63.9 percent of Jordanians respectively, according to a survey carried out by the Centre of Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan in 2006. Changes in public perception of armed groups are related to impactful events. As an example, support to Hezbollah decreased from 84 per cent in 2004 to 63.9 percent in 2006 due to the murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri

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<sup>51</sup> Global Forum for Moderation, "About us", 2016 [15/09/2018]. Available at <https://www.wasatyea.net/?q=en/node/5596>

<sup>52</sup> World Interfaith Harmony Week, 2018 [15/09/2018]. Available at <http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/>

<sup>53</sup> Grieve, C., "Meet the female sheikhas tackling Islamic extremism in Jordan", *SBS*, 02/12/2016 [15/09/2018]. Available at <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/culture/article/2016/11/28/meet-female-sheikhas-tackling-islamic-extremism-jordan>

<sup>54</sup> Al-Sharafat, S., "Assesing Jordan's... *op. cit.*

in 2005.<sup>55</sup> Same case applies to Al-Qaeda, whose support diminished from 67 percent in 2004 to 20 percent in 2005 after the November 2005 Amman attacks.<sup>56</sup> Another survey carried out by the same centre in 2014 reflects the consideration of Jordanians of terrorist organizations of Daesh (62 per cent), Al-Qaeda (44 per cent) and al-Nusra Front (31 per cent). Again, this perception drastically changed after the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh was burned alive by Daesh in January 2015. After that, supporting Daesh has become a social stigma.<sup>57</sup>

Because of that, the Jordanian government has insisted in the need to counter extremism through the media. Since 2015, several experts and media professionals have warned about the need of media outlets to deliver more objective information to the people and not biased reports. In 2016 a two-day international conference took place in Amman where religious scholars, experts and researchers from different Muslim countries participated to expose ways to counter extremist groups' narratives, focusing mainly on the refutation of *fatawa* issued by these groups. In 2017, Mohammad Momani, Minister of State for Media Affairs, addressed different forums on the role of the media countering extremist narratives. He highlighted the responsibility of the media in refuting allegations and the distortion of Islam and explained the Jordanian experience in this regard: at the political and professional level, the identification of frameworks and policies of dealing with media outlets in order to enhance the role of moderate media; at the legal level, laws were enacted to fortify communities and limit violations; at the security level, the tracking of violations that may threaten the national security.<sup>58</sup>

However, a 2017 study carried out by WANA Institute is not that optimistic. According to this study, there is a «conflation between Daesh and terrorism, which frames the group as the representative of all violent extremism. This overlooks many nuances and

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<sup>55</sup> Al-Shishani, M. B., "Jordanian Poll Indicates Erosion of Public Support to Al-Qaeda", Publication: Terrorism Focus Volume: 3 Issue: 6, Jamestown Foundation, 14/02/2006 [20/08/2018]. Available at <https://jamestown.org/program/jordanian-poll-indicates-erosion-of-public-support-for-al-qaeda/>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> Schenker, D., "There's a worrisome amount of support in Jordan for the Islamic State", *The New Republic*, 20/10/2014 [20/08/2018]. Available at <https://newrepublic.com/article/119909/islamic-state-isis-support-jordan-worrying-poll>

<sup>58</sup> *The Jordan Times*, "Momani outlines Jordan's media approach to terror", 27/11/2017 [20/09/2018]. Available at <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/momani-outlines-jordan%E2%80%99s-media-approach-terror>

complexities of different violent extremist groups». <sup>59</sup> As well, the description of extremism focuses on the acts of violent extremism and forgets the radicalization process and the reasons behind violent extremism. Al-Rawasdeh has a similar opinion when he points out that what is needed is «to confront and counteract extremism, and not merely crack down on extremists». <sup>60</sup> In addition, the counter-narratives depict the world in the same right and wrong view without offering alternatives, contributing to the perpetuation of the paradigm used by extremist groups. Lastly, those counter-narratives usually only reach an audience that already shares the views they promote. <sup>61</sup>

### **Social level**

To finalize, efforts in the social realm have fallen short, especially when most of the research that has been carried out until this moment has shown that the socioeconomic conditions, corruption and lack of critical thinking are the factors behind the recruitment to extremist groups in Jordan, ahead of the religious and ideological ones. Economic reform has been hampered by the critical situation the country's economy is facing, with cuts in public spending and taxes rising due to the financial commitments with institutions such as the IMF. These measures have angered Jordanian people, who cannot face the constant deterioration of the economic situation. The outcome of this anger has been the protests that spread all over the country last June and which resulted in the reshuffle of the cabinet as well as the financial rescue by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

Efforts at the educational and cultural levels are even less remarkable. The educational system is a great generator of extremism due to its reinforcement of stereotypes and hate speech against certain social groups while at the same time ignoring critical thinking and encouraging a dogmatic education that indoctrinates more than what it educates. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of High Education have updated educational curricula to comply with «moderate Islam». However, as pointed out by Al-Sharafat, this

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<sup>59</sup> WANA Institute, "Media narratives countering violent extremism", 2017 [20/09/2018]. Available at <http://wanainstitute.org/en/news/media-narratives-countering-violent-extremism>; The whole study can be reached at [http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publication\\_CounterNarratives\\_English\\_0.pdf](http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publication_CounterNarratives_English_0.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> Al-Rawashdeh, H., "Jordan's Approach to Counter-Extremism", en *Methods of Preventing and Combatting Terrorism in the MENA Region and in the West*, Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016: 102.

<sup>61</sup> WANA Institute, "Media narratives... *op. cit.*

approach, led by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has been criticized for being a «source of extremist teachings».<sup>62</sup> The space for debate and discussion of political and religious ideas at home is also very limited, which leads young people to resort to the Internet in order to find the answers that they do not receive at home.<sup>63</sup> As well, as noted in the beginning, conservative salafism, through its infiltration in educational and community spaces, has expanded its conservative ideology across many segments of society. Osborne and Bondokji note that «many of the beliefs and norms which are seen as indicative of extremist thought, especially from a Western lens, are high».<sup>64</sup> This conservative mentality has resulted in an increasing level of hate speech at the social level, with outcomes such as the murder of cartoonist Nahed Hattar in 2016, which was addressed in Table 1.

### **Final remarks: lights and shadows of the Jordanian counterterrorist strategy**

Despite the praises that the Jordanian counterterrorist strategy receives, the fact is that, as this document shows, there is no definite strategy. This fact faces us with the challenge of determining the factors that influence, the elements that outline, and the policies that shape the Jordanian approach to the fight against extremism and terrorism. The subsequent analysis of the aforementioned elements sheds a series of lights and shadows on them.

Among the lights of the Jordanian approach in the fight against terrorism and extremism, the effectiveness of the security forces in dismantling terrorist cells and preventing the perpetration of attacks against civilian objectives should be noted. As well, the Armed Forces have played a key role in avoiding the infiltration of armed groups through the borders into Jordanian territory. Finally, the institutional and political developments

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<sup>62</sup> Al-Sharafat, S., "Assessing Jordan's... *op. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> Yom, S. Y Sammour, K., "Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalization in Jordan: Social and Political Dimensions", *CTC Sentinel*, Volumen 10, N°4, Abril 2017[10/04/2018]. Available at [https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/05/CTC-Sentinel\\_Vol10Iss44.pdf](https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2017/05/CTC-Sentinel_Vol10Iss44.pdf); Bondokji, N., Wilkinson, K., y Aghabi, L., "Trapped between destructive choices: radicalization drivers affecting youth in Jordan", WANA Institute, 2016 [10/04/2018]. Available at <http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/trapped-between-destructive-choices-radicalisation-drivers-affecting-youth-jordan>

<sup>64</sup> Osborne, A. y Bondokji, N., "Post-Daesh and still desperate: the Ongoing Drivers of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon", WANA Institute, 2018.

regarding the fight against extremism have succeeded in giving visibility to the phenomenon in the country at all levels.

However, the shadows seem to be more influential in the analysis of the Jordanian approach. First, the pre-eminence of intelligence services in the design and management of the counterterrorist policy has resulted in a securitization of the phenomenon at all levels. This has had many negative consequences: the radicalization of members of moderate groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood; the growing deterioration of fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression; and censorship and control of media outlets which outcome is an increasing level of disinformation shared among Jordanians about the problem of extremism. Second, the approach to this phenomenon is determined by this securitarian stance, which focuses on police and judicial persecution while neglecting the political, socioeconomic and cultural conditions behind recruitment into extremist groups. The consequence of this blindness has been the inability to stop the influx of Jordanian youth into the arms of extremist groups.

To conclude, the Jordanian counterterrorist strategy sheds more shadows than lights. In order to change the course of the situation, several measures are necessary, including reversing the lack of ambition on the part of Jordanian authorities to address a growing challenge. It is imperative to “de-securitize” extremism and its prevention, supporting participative approaches which allow the participation of civil society groups, easing access to information for scholars and journalists while decriminalizing those who research or report about extremism and terrorism issues. Finally, all these measures need to be developed and implemented in a transparent and critical manner, subjecting them to an evaluation that would allow their adaptation in order to stop the expansion of extremism and violent ideologies in the country before it is too late.

*Victoria Silva Sánchez\**

Independent journalist and researcher based in Amman

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