



JORDAN STANDS OUT TO TERRORISM MILITARY AND SOFT APPROACHES

Dr. Mohamed el-Adhamat

Geographically located at the height of the storm, Jordan – over the past three decades or so – has been glaringly experiencing the dire consequences of chaos and conflict; admittedly, it is an uneasy time of unrest which a such volatile yet vulnerable region has been and is still trudging through. Left helpless in the lurch, Jordan has unwittingly slipped into the gusty yet adverse winds of terrorism and violence whipping the country up and sweeping through the region at every turn to sow venomous seeds of extremism almost everywhere. Very much similar to the neighboring Arab countries in the region, Jordan has been stormed by a spate of terrorist attacks aimed at undermining its security and stability. With terrorism being drummed up for, the magnitude of the wave of attacks has become downright frenzied with Daesh mushrooming in the immediate vicinity of Jordan. Lurking inside the evil ideologues, such an obnoxious visitor, so to speak, has covertly sneaked into the hearts of some Jordanian youth, who have been so naively decoyed, lured and tempted into swallowing the bait made up of camouflaged coercion, violence and brutality. Meanwhile, the Jordanian government has worked out a set of soft and military approaches to countering the existing and imminent terrorist threat. Only then did the Government notch up resounding successes.

Terrorist Threat to Jordan

Heroically enough, the episodes of the Jordanian contemporary story started to take shape some years into the millennium, when the Jordanian security services foiled a fiendish plot targeting tourist sites and political and foreign figures. Following this ignominious defeat, a group of 13 people were then arrested, including two non-Jordanian terrorists: one from Iraq and one from Algeria who had previously engaged in the Afghan experience of belligerency. Flipping or flicking through the following pages of the Jordanian story, we come to narrate the 2002 assassination of USAID official Lawrence Foley in Amman by an Al-Qaeda affiliated cell. Then later in April 2004, the so-called "Jayyousi" case came to prominence when the security services thwarted a plot of a large chemical attack, targeting the General Intelligence Headquarters, the US Embassy in Amman and the Premiership Headquarters. Courageously, the security forces seized 20 tons of chemical explosives that could have caused thousands of casualties if set off and detonated.

Ahead in 2005, the first chapter of the story was sealed with three synchronic terrorist attacks using explosive belts, targeting three hotels in central Amman, claiming the lives of 57 people while injuring hundreds of others. Soon Al-Qaeda in Iraq, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for the operation, which has been classified by the Jordanian security services as one of the largest and most devastating operations in Jordan's history. Swirled amid these terrorist squalls which acted like a real slap in the face to the whole world, Jordan realized that no single country was immune to the threat and evils of terrorist organizations. Sadly enough, no sooner it drew breath than did the second wave of Daesh terrorist attacks break out.

The second chapter of the terrorism story was the most dolorous, featuring terrifyingly the heartbreaking savage method of burning the Jordanian pilot Muath Kasasebeh alive by the notoriously cold-blooded terrorist organization "Daesh" in 2015; it was a downright horrendous manner that wreaked havoc deeply on the Jordanian conscience. With time tramping through 2016, Jordan again underwent a spate of traumatic incidents; a Jordanian Armed Forces officer was martyred following the storming of the house of a Daesh-affiliated cell in the city of Irbid, north of Jordan, in which 7 members of the armed terrorist cell were killed in the clash, while others were arrested. Following a series of atrocious attacks that swept through the region, 7 soldiers of the Jordanian Armed Forces were martyred and 14 others were injured when they were targeted by a booby-trap bomb car sent from the Syrian side into the Jordanian border area at Al-Rukban. More so, a wave of terrorist operations in December 2016 were carried out in Karak; terrorists opened fire in the historic Karak Citadel, killing 10 people, including 7 security men and a Canadian tourist, while injuring 34 others. Later, members of a terrorist organization cell opened fire, which led to the death of 4 security men and gendarmerie, wounding 11 others. The Jordanian Security Forces tracked down the attackers and broke into a house in northern Karak where some members of the terrorist cell holed up. The result was that 4 security men and gendarmerie forces were martyred, while 11 others were injured, arresting a wanted terrorist and shooting dead another. Marking the end part of the second chapter was the 2018 terrorist attack, when a trained Daesh fighter bombed out a security patrol in the city of Fuheis in Balqa Region without any casualties, followed by an armed confrontation with a terrorist cell in the city of Salt, in which 5 security men were martyred and 3 terrorists were shot dead, while 5 others were arrested and tens were injured.

With thousands of Jordanian youth in robust engagement on the Syrian and Iraqi fronts, and the profound lack of a clear vision of their fate or practical arrangements for their return or homecoming, the chapters of the story of terrorism in Jordan remain yet scalable and likely to have more stories to narrate. Given such a high likelihood, the Jordanian government has felt a dire need to adopt a holistic strategy to address the challenges that may arise in the immediate, foreseeable or not-too-distant future .

Military Security Approach

Ever since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the Jordanian political and security institutions have followed closely the ins and outs of the situation in Syria. In the first three years, Jordan has cautiously refrained from direct involvement in the Syrian issue, while paying attention to the humanitarian outreach programs and relief aid for Syrian refugees, including the displaced, impacted, and vulnerable people. Since 2014, however, the Iraqi and Syrian crises have overlapped as Daesh started then to sneak and infiltrate into both countries, gaining wide spread to control over large swathes of Iraq and Syria, and the declaration of the too-driving and too-burning ambition of establishment of the Islamic Caliphate to expand to the region countries in the immediate vicinity and to engulf the entire world. With such developments snowballing into the current situation, Jordan has become one of the countries most threatened by this organization, due to the geographical location adjacent to Iraq and Syria.

Given the coherence of the GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS under which more that 60 countries were subsumed and was spearheaded by the United States in August 2014, following military strikes on ISIS positions both in Iraq and Syria, Jordan has felt the overpowering urge to officially join such an entity. With the full membership granted to Jordan, the Jordan Air Force aircrafts have been involved since 23 September 2014, along with the United States and a handful of other countries to carry out airstrikes against ISIS's vital targets over ISIS-held control areas in Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Abu Kamal, Hassakeh, and some other areas in the general vicinity. This was meant to eradicate and annihilate the Organization's fighters and destroy its command headquarters and training centers, along with its supply areas, logistics, weapons, arsenals and equipment stores.

In the same vein, Jordan has provided intelligence and logistical support to the parties of the GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS, such as providing facilities, military bases and airports necessary to carry out airstrikes on the Organization's target sites in Syria and Iraq. Jordan's air bases were the main launching pad for US, British and French aircraft in striking the Organization's targets in Syria, while the Jordanian intelligence services exchanged information with the GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS member countries on the covert movements of the Organization's leaders and members .

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worked to attract and develop its relations with the Sunni tribes in Anbar in such a fashion as to purposefully enfeeble, enervate and devitalize the Organization and depriving it of the grassroots incubator which it openly and proudly boasts of, while setting up an insurmountable barrier to the Organization's ambitions to expand beyond the Jordanian territory. To the Iraqis' succor, Jordan has as always provided intelligence and training support to the Iraqi government while combating and countering ISIS.

Speaking of Syria, Jordan has established solid relations with tribes, clans and actors in southern Syria and built alliances there that would contribute to strengthening the role of the Free Army, while controlling the trajectory of the military operation in Horan and weakening the presence or even ubiquity of ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra in such areas. The alliances went far away to include expansion into the countryside of Deir Ezzor and the eastern region of Syria, adjacent to the Rukban Camp where ISIS once reigned over the whole province. Impressively, the “cushion policy” proved successful in providing conducive and favorable conditions for the protection of Jordanian national security.

Reflecting on the deeply held conviction, Jordan has felt the enormous importance of the Russian leading role in Syria. To this end and in an effort to establish “de-escalation” zones on the Jordanian-Syrian border, Jordan has opened up close cooperation to the Russian side in concert with the United States to find alternative arrangements in southern Syria that best serve Jordan's national security.

It was in July 2017 that Jordan reached an agreement with the United States and Russia on sensible arrangements to support a ceasefire in southwestern Syria. Accordingly, and as stated in the foregoing multilateral agreement, they called a halt to ceasefire along the lines of contact under the agreement of the Syrian government and associated forces on the one hand, and the Syrian armed opposition forces on the other. The critically important agreement has made up a quantum leap towards a permanent “de-escalation” zone in southern Syria, ending hostilities, appalling atrocities, restoring stability and allowing humanitarian access to this vulnerable and impacted area of Syria. In late August 2017, Jordan and Russia announced that the Amman Center was put into action to monitor the ceasefire agreement in southern Syria, in the cities of Daraa and Quneitra, and support the delivery of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and outreach programs to the southern regions.

Soft Approach

The Amman Message was the first intellectual approach adopted by the Jordanian government in the fight against terrorism; a detailed statement issued by King Abdullah II, dated November 9, 2004. The aim of the Amman Message is to well explain the true essence of Islam and to showcase that widely-adopted tolerance of Islam and totally-rejected extremism are poles apart. The Amman Message reemphasizes the sanctity, inviolability and sacredness of human life and the inadmissibility of attacks on peaceful civilians and their property. It spells out that the terrorist acts carried out by few Muslims are contrary to the real essence of Islam. The Amman Message promotes and strengthens the commonalities among the followers of religions and sets out an approach to open an interfaith dialogue that leads to a greater sense of rapprochement, détente and mutual understanding. The Amman Message makes up a well-balanced soft advocacy curriculum based on resiliency while rejecting all forms of extremism.

Based on the Amman Message, an internal Islamic dialogue was established among a wealth of Muslim scholars, which principally came up with a three-point agreement known as the contents of the Amman Message. It is primarily related to the adoption of an ambiguous and comprehensive definition of a Muslim

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in the framework of the different schools and sects of thought and faith the scholars of which have come to an agreement that the followers of such schools and sects are all Muslims and should not be looked down at as disbelievers. The mutual agreement reached at also emphasizes to take care of the commonalities of these sects which all are in accordance with the principles of religion and their minor difference is practically confined, stressing the necessity of not providing fatwas by unqualified parties or claiming jurisprudence in religion and the creation of new doctrines and sects or fatwas that contravene and flout the rules, principles and constants of Sharia .

The COMMON WORD INITIATIVE was the second intellectual approach that sought to promote a culture of harmony and peace between peoples and religions; it is an initiative endorsed by a wealth of prominent Muslim scholars under the auspices of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, aimed at defining a common platform for dialogue and relations between Muslims and Christians. The Initiative came in an open message in which 38 Muslim scholars responded in October 2006 to Pope Benedict XVI's keynote speech, in which scholars of all Muslim groups spoke one language about the true teachings of Islam. A year later, scholars expanded their message. One hundred and thirty-eight scholars from all Islamic schools of thought and schools met to announce the document, Common Word Between Us and You, which addressed the common denominator between Christianity and Islam .

In September 2007, the final version of the Document was presented at the conference under the auspices of King Abdullah II held by the Royal Academy of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought themed LOVE IN THE HOLY QURAN. The conferees agreed that the commonalities between Islam and Christianity, which make up the ideal springboard for interfaith dialogue and understanding, is love of Allah, love of neighbor and love of good.

In September 2010, King Abdullah II launched the INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK INITIATIVE before the United Nations General Assembly to encourage people in general and the youth in particular to embrace the noble principles of tolerance and coexistence. Less than a month after the launch of the Initiative, the United Nations unanimously adopted it, marking the first week of February as the Interfaith Harmony Week. The idea of the

INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK INITIATIVE is based on the pioneering work of the COMMON WORD INITIATIVE and on the concepts of love of Allah, love of neighbor and love of good, and provides a week-long platform to demonstrate the power of interfaith and goodwill dialogue groups.

Finally, in 2014, the Jordanian government prepared a national plan to counter extremism in the wake of the expansion of extremism and terrorism across the region in particular and the world in general, especially the terrorist organization – Daesh – which reached its peak in 2014.

The plan defines the responsibilities of different ministries and institutions to achieve effective control of extremism. The plan further stresses that confronting extremism and intellectual radicalization requires joint efforts involving all aspects related to this phenomenon religiously, culturally, educationally, socially, economically and politically. The National Plan to Combat Extremism identifies three main frameworks as the pillars for the intellectual treatment of the culture of extremism. First Framework: Establishing a true Islamic religious culture based on the purposes of the tolerant Islamic Sharia, which came to preserve the five basic purposes that guarantee human happiness in the world and the hereafter: honoring religion, soul, mind, offspring, and money; Second Framework: Promoting a community culture based on political pluralism and respect for public freedoms and civil rights. Third Framework: Establishing of the values of tolerance, inclusion and acceptance of the other, through all institutions concerned with education and guidance, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Sites, the Ministry of Culture, youth and media institutions, and the Fatwa Department.

In conclusion, it can be stated that any effective approach to countering terrorism should be based on two main pillars. First, it is critically important to understand the nature of terrorism and its ideological, political, economic and social roots and backgrounds behind its emergence, coupled with a careful and thoughtful reading of terrorism at the national level; this helps in the formulation of realistic plans to combat terrorist organizations. Second, it is essentially seminal to emphasize the intellectual, security and military dimensions in the face of terrorism, while reviewing national plans and initiatives based on national interests, supported by thoughtful programs of action and clear assessment tools .