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The Jihad in Jordan



DRIVERS OF RADICALIZATION INTO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN JORDAN

Anne Speckhard, Ph.D.

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This report is based on in-depth research interviews conducted throughout Jordan in November 2016 and February 2017 with security and counter-terrorism experts, journalists, mental healthcare workers, diplomats, youth, military, terrorist ideologues and parents of those who spent time fighting with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq as well as a review of available English language reports on violent extremism as it pertains to Jordan. Special thanks to Ranya Kadri for her generous help in arranging interviews, making connections, and interpreting both literally and culturally, often while graciously hosting us in her home. Thanks also to our ICSVE Research Director, Ardian Shajkovci, for accompanying me on most of the interviews and his assistance writing and editing this report. And thanks to all the respondents, named and unnamed, who generously shared their insights.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is estimated that since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, over 30,000 foreign fighters have joined Sunni militant groups, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, in Iraq and Syria. The Middle East, with approximately 11,000 foreign fighters, remains the primary source of foreign fighters in the Syrian and the Iraq conflict. According to recent estimates, Jordan is ranked as either the first or the second country in the world with over 3000 foreign fighters, the highest number of foreign fighters, on a per capita basis, in the Syrian and the Iraq conflict. This report synthesizes existing knowledge on the drivers of radicalization leading to violent extremism in Jordan as well as introduces new knowledge on the topic. The most important highlights of the research are that unemployment, frustrations with governance, unequal opportunities, proximity to Syria and to the terrorist groups operating there, the spread of militant jihadi ideologies, strong identification with Sunni victims in nearby sectarian conflicts, and anger over sectarian politics witnessed in activities during the previous Iraq war, and now in Syria, serve as powerful motivators into violent extremism in Jordan. As the data in this report suggest, Jordan remains an active contributor of foreign fighters to the neighboring Syria and Iraq and violent extremists have managed to inspire and mount attacks inside Jordan as well. “Social ISIS” is on the rise as ideological concepts are increasingly accepted, such as suicide terrorism as “martyrdom” and Takfiri ideas that those who disagree with one’s interpretation of religion can, and should, be killed. Regardless of whether foreign fighters stay or return, they will continue to pose a threat to Jordan, either through direct involvement, through proxies, or through their family ties. In this context, this report presents a number of policies that could help to address vulnerabilities among susceptible and vulnerable populations and potentially help curb the future flow of Jordanian foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq and protect Jordan from the threat of militant jihadi infiltration and attacks on its own soil.

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Introduction

The drivers of radicalization to violent extremism in Jordan are many. Beginning with a decades-long history of violent extremist and terrorist movements operating in Jordan, and involving Jordanians, alongside the destabilizing and radicalizing factors occurring in the region and globally, peaceful Jordan has found itself pulled into a global storm involving terrorist groups and their ideologies, with al-Nusra (the local Syrian arm of al-Qaeda) and ISIS operating in Syria and Iraq at its current center. Likewise, the repeated influx of refugees from neighboring conflicts, economic and governance challenges, and Salafi influences migrating into Jordan have all combined to create vulnerabilities and motivations on a psychosocial level that have ideological resonance to terrorist recruitment inside Jordan. While Jordan remains a country with relative political stability and is one of the trusted U.S. and coalition partners against ISIS and the Islamic State, the data suggest, Jordan also remains an active contributor of foreign fighters to the conflicts in neighboring Syria and Iraq. Likewise, recent militant jihadi terrorist attacks occurring inside Jordan have also given cause for serious concern. Regardless of whether foreign fighters stay or return, they will continue to represent a threat to Jordan, whether it be through direct involvement, through proxies, or through their family ties. This report was undertaken to consider drivers of radicalization in Jordan, including radicalization leading to violence, to both identify vulnerabilities and generate policies that could prevent the future flow of Jordanian foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq and stem the tide of violent attacks inside Jordan.

History of Radicalization in Jordan

Terrorism is always contextual. During two decades of interviewing over five hundred terrorists and researching their groups and ideologies, I have learned that there are four usual and necessary components to make a terrorist: 1) exposure to a group, 2) its ideology, 3) social support for both the group and its ideology, and 4) individual vulnerabilities and motivations that resonate to the group and its ideology, and find support within the individual's community—these days, virtual or face-to-face. Individual vulnerabilities and motivations further break out according to whether one lives in a conflict zone or outside of one.¹ Jordan has its own unique history of radicalizing factors, groups, ideologies, social support and individual vulnerabilities

¹ Anne Speckhard, "The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism," *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, February 25, 2016, available at <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/Extremism>, February 25, 2016, available at <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/>; Speckhard, A. (2012). *Talking to terrorists: Understanding the psycho-social motivations of militant jihadi terrorists, mass hostage takers, suicide bombers and "martyrs"*. McLean, VA: Advances Press.

and motivations, each discussed in this report, that contribute to the current success of violent extremist groups recruiting Jordanians into their ranks.

Since its inception as a modern-day state, Jordan has faced a long history of radicalizing factors. A volatile political situation in Jordan has existed over the last half a century vis-à-vis the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. It began with Jordan's annexation of the West Bank in 1948, along with its Palestinian population. Then, following its

“Jordan remains a country with relative political stability and is one of the trusting U.S. and coalition partners against ISIS.”

1967 war with Israel, there was the subsequent influx of Palestinian refugees back into Jordan as Israel recaptured the West Bank. A highly radicalized Palestinian population resonant with terrorist groups and willing to engage in violent attacks against Israel, have at times threatened to destabilize Jordan as well. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) based itself in Jordan from 1967 to 1970, until Black September broke out in 1970 with a brief, but bloody, civil war claiming thousands of lives. As a result, Jordan expelled twenty thousand PLO fighters and leaders into Lebanon, along with their families, and demolished their camps, making their return impossible. Palestinians who remained in Jordan, however, were hardly calmed in their enmity against Israel. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which rages on even today, is a topic that is wide-ranging and beyond the scope of this report—other than to mention it as one basis for current streams of radicalization existing currently inside Jordan.

In addition to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the decade-long “jihad” in Afghanistan during the eighties drew Jordanians to join the foreign fighters coming from all around the Arab world, some of whom eventually joined the nascent al-Qaeda and its global movement. Abdullah Azzam, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood from Jordan, is credited by many as the “father of global jihad” and was one of the Palestinian Jordanians present with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan.² Near the end of the jihadi offensive against the Russians, Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a former thug turned religious, was drawn to Afghanistan where he met with Osama bin Laden. Invigorated in his return from Afghanistan, Zarqawi aimed his sites at overthrowing the Jordanian monarchy and unsuccessfully plotted in 1999 to blow up the Radisson SAS hotel in Amman that housed Israeli and American military troops.³ After being imprisoned for some time and then released in a general amnesty, Zarqawi fled back to Afghanistan where he received support from al-Qaeda to start his paramilitary training camp and form al Tawhid wal-Jihad into which he attracted other Jordanian militants. In 2002, it is believed that Zarqawi was again involved in a plot inside Jordan, although this time remotely, which was successfully

2 Some credit Azzam with helping to form al-Qaeda, but his son, Huthaifa Azzam, claims he resisted the movement and was totally against their Takfir beliefs. He was killed in a car bomb in Peshawar in 1989.

3 Jonathan Finer and Craig Whitlock, “Zarqawi’s Network Asserts It Launched Attacks in Amman,” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2005, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/10/AR2005111002074.html>

carried out and led to the death of U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley.⁴

As the Afghan jihad wound down by the early 90s, Jordan faced another massive influx of Palestinian refugees. Following the PLO's support of Saddam Hussein's invasion and eventual occupation of Kuwait, some 200,000 Palestinians, many of whom had resided in Kuwait for decades, were expelled. Another 200,000 who had fled during the Iraqi invasion were denied return to Kuwait, leading to many Kuwaiti Palestinians migrating to Jordan.⁵ The influx of Palestinians who had lived in Kuwait, along with the returning Afghan jihadis, caused another change in Jordan: bringing with them Gulf interpretations of Islam, introducing new schools of Salafi Islamic thought that are more closely aligned to extremist groups like al-Qaeda and now ISIS that endorse Takfiri ideas as well. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a current al-Qaeda terrorist ideologue, was among the Palestinians who came to Jordan via Kuwait. In prison, he would later become the spiritual mentor of the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

While arguably Zarqawi remains among the most infamous of Afghan jihadis, Jordanians who fought in Afghanistan have gone on to become fighters in Yemen, Somalia, the Caucasus, Iraq, and now Syria. According to Dr. Munif Samara, a leading figure in the Salafi jihadist movement, "Wherever there is Jihad, there are Jordanian fighters. Many of our brothers who left Jordan have become the backbone of the global Jihad against the infidel regimes and the blatant foreign interference in the countries of Islam."⁶

During this time, Saddam Hussein in neighboring Iraq also turned from relying on the totally secular Baathist party, to currying favor from Islamic and Salafi factions of society, more specifically, as Jordanian scholar Hasan Abu Hanya noted, "There was a change in the Iraqi army during Saddam's reign. In 1994 he started the Faith campaign, and he started changing the army.

He started with Allahu Akbar [God is Greatest]. He had the Calipha praying. He didn't call himself the caliph, but he was playing with this."⁷

Palestinian Jordanians were often first Jordanians who embraced global jihad. Estimates are that approximately half of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin. From that population, some of the most influential terrorist ideologues and leadership of both al-Qaeda and more local Palestinian movements have arisen, including Abu Qatada, who for years resided in the U.K. and is often

4 Ibid.

5 Steven J. Rosen, "Kuwait Expels Thousands of Palestinians," *Middle East Quarterly* 19, no.4 (2012): 75-73.

6 Tamer al-Samadi, "Jordanian Jihadists Prefer Yemen," *al-Monitor*, May 19, 2012, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/05/jordanians-fight-with-al-qaeda-i.html#ixzz4U3SWzxXs> May 19, 2012).

7 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

“Wherever there is Jihad, there are Jordanian fighters. Many of our brothers who left Jordan have become the backbone of the global Jihad against the infidel regimes and the blatant foreign interference in the countries of Islam.”

referred to as the “spiritual father” of al-Qaeda in Europe, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who is a militant jihadi ideologue and was the spiritual mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Both Abu Qatada and Maqdisi currently reside in Jordan and continue to spread and endorse militant jihad.⁸

In 2002, Daniel Pearl was beheaded by al-Qaeda, sending shock waves of a new form of terrorist brutality around the globe. Then, just before the 2003 U.S.-led coalition invasion of Iraq, Zarqawi and his small band of fellow militants in Afghanistan departed to enter Iraq. Following the onset of the Iraq invasion and subsequent U.S. occupation, Zarqawi’s terrorist group began a series of bombings, beheadings, hostage executions, and suicide attacks, creating an insurgency against the U.S. and the coalition-led troops, and unleashing a brutal Shia-Sunni conflict in Iraq. Sunnis in Iraq also experienced a major crisis as the government of Iraq was reconstituted, with Shia having majority power and high-level former Baathists in the government, military, intel and police dismissed from their jobs.

In 2004 Zarqawi’s group joined al-Qaeda, and became known as al-Qaeda in Iraq—the precursor organization to ISIS. Zarqawi was killed in Iraq by U.S. airstrikes in 2006, but not before he had managed to incite fellow Jordanians to join him in his jihad in Iraq as well as to mount terrorist attacks inside Jordan.⁹ In 2004, Jordanian intelligence officials broke up a Zarqawi instigated plot to unleash chemical attacks at multiple targets in Amman, attacks that likely would have been horrifically lethal, killing many.¹⁰ In 2005, Jordan also suffered three simultaneous hotel bombings in Amman, also organized by Zarqawi, that led to the deaths of sixty people.¹¹

Through the rise of al-Qaeda and then al-Qaeda in Iraq, Jordanians, like many around the world, became exposed to the al-Qaeda ideology, claiming Muslims, Islamic lands, and even Islam itself to be under attack by Western powers. The al-Qaeda narrative also targeted and undermined regimes in the Arab world, specifically stressing how despotic Arab regimes backed by the West are lording over Muslim populations. Moreover, the glorification of suicide terrorism as a form of Islamic “martyrdom” caught fire. In Jordan, suicide terrorism first found support during the second intifada in Israel where many sympathizers felt Palestinians were justified in using their bodies to carry bombs into Israeli military and civilian targets when facing an overwhelming military force, and what many referred to as a highly militarized society. This endorsement and glorification of suicide terrorism to fight a much greater power resonated with some, again in Iraq, as Zarqawi took the numbers of suicide attacks in Iraq to unprecedented levels.

Iraqi war refugees flooded into Jordan in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and again during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Sunni leaders of the Anbar resistance—including

8 See Anne Speckhard, “Abu Qatada: The “Spiritual Father” of al-Qaeda in Europe reflecting on terrorism and the future of the Middle East as Trump takes the U.S. Presidency, *ICSVE Brief Reports*, November 23, 2016, available at <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/abu-qatada-the-spiritual-father-of-al-qaeda-in-europe-reflecting-on-terrorism-and-the-future-of-the-middle-east-as-trump-takes-the-u-s-presidency>. Also interviewed Feb, 2017.

9 Jonathan Finer and Craig Whitlock, “Zarqawi’s Network Asserts It Launched Attacks in Amman.”

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

a number of Saddam's former cabinet members and many Sunni tribal sheiks—moved into Jordan. Some of them brought a deep-seated anger and resentment towards the situation and started plotting violent responses to retake power in Iraq. As a result of the recent Syrian conflict, “twice displaced” Iraqi refugees from the two previous conflicts also entered Jordan via Syria. At the beginning of January 2014, the number of Iraqi refugees registered in Jordan was reported to be at 20,286.¹²

As the war in Iraq calmed and U.S. troops departed leaving a fragile Iraqi government in place, a new onslaught of Middle Eastern instability occurred. Uprisings occurring in the 2010-2011 Tunisian revolution as well as in the 2011 Egyptian revolution, spread hope for increased freedoms and better governance across the Middle East, bringing the “Arab Spring” also into Jordan. In January 2011, a series of protests erupted against prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in the country, namely high levels of unemployment, inflation, and claims of government corruption, along with demands for constitutional and electoral reforms.

The protests continued throughout the year. The Jordanian Arab Spring uprisings were eventually quelled with new Parliamentary elections and by fears among the populace over the spread of violence and chaos observed in neighboring Syria. Jordanians became deeply concerned as tens of thousands of neighboring Syrians were being killed in what had turned from hopeful protests to armed clashes. Despite this, Jordanian protests erupted again in 2012 in the southern city of Ma'an, at which times black flags of ISIS were flown in the streets. Although, as noted later in this report, those flags were part of a political game. While signally danger, they were not yet necessarily indicative of ISIS penetration into Jordanian society.

The popular uprisings in Syria that morphed into armed conflict and the rise of militant jihadi groups, including al-Nusra and ISIS, also threatened the peace and stability of neighboring Jordan. With the 2011 uprisings in Syria and subsequent armed conflicts, another inpouring of Syrian refugees began, with two thousand Syrians per day crossing the borders into Jordan at some points in time. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that, as of November 2015, there were 630,776 Syrians registered as refugees in Jordan.¹³ The Jordanian government, however, estimates the total Syrian refugee count, including unregistered migrants, at over 1.4 million.¹⁴

12 ICMC Europe, “Iraqi Refugees in Jordan, Lebanon & Syria,” *European Resettlement Network*, 2013, available at <http://www.resettlement.eu/page/iraqi-refugees-jordan-lebanon-syria>

13 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response,” *UNHCR*, 2016, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

14 Josh Rogin, “U.S. and Jordan in a Dispute over Syrian Refugees,” *Bloomberg*, October 6, 2015, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-10-06/u-s-and-jordan-in-a-dispute-over-syrian-refugees>

“Depending on which statistics are used, Jordan is ranked as the first, or second, country in the world with the highest total number of foreign fighters.”

Only twenty percent of the Syrian refugees who entered Jordan are living in refugee camps set up in Za'atari, Marjeb al-Fahood, Cyber City, and al-Azraq. The majority live interspersed throughout the state, mainly in Amman, Irbid, al-Mafraq, and Jerash. Tensions have arisen with local populations over illegal workers taking Jordanian jobs and regarding strained budgets for water, electricity, and medical care of refugees. Likewise, there are concerns that refugees coming across the Syrian border into Jordan may be affiliated with the militant jihadi groups of ISIS and al-Nusra. Focus group participants in a village near Irbid echoed these concerns.¹⁵

Foreign Fighter Involvement of Jordanians in Syria & Iraq

It is estimated that since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, upwards of 38,000 foreign fighters from over one hundred nations have joined Sunni militant groups, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, in Iraq and Syria.¹⁶ The Middle East has been the primary source with approximately 11,000 foreign fighters having left to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.¹⁷

Jordan has hardly been immune to the rise of ISIS right next door—that is, their rapid expansion in Syria and following that, into northern and eastern parts of Iraq, their 2014 claim of establishing a “Caliphate,” and their powerful and seductive online and face-to-face propaganda calls to join. Depending on which statistics are used, Jordan is ranked as the first, or second, country in the world with the highest total number of foreign fighters (see Table One). According to data calculated from existing sources reported by Soufan and ICSR and by Radio Free Europe, Jordan has the highest ratio of foreign fighters in the world calculated on a per capita basis, specifically per million of its citizens (309), followed by Tunisia (280), Saudi Arabia (107), Bosnia (92), Kosovo (83), Turkmenistan (72), Albania (46), and Belgium (40) (See Tables One and Two).

The Jordanian government does not give out regular and detailed information about their foreign fighters, thus one must rely on independent sources and expert statements to calculate the numbers of Jordanians going to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters. When local experts were asked for their assessments, retired security officials and policy experts estimated that since the beginning of the conflict in 2011 up to 2015, 3000 to 3950 Jordanians have traveled to the conflict zone. It is also estimated that anywhere from 250 to 1500 have been killed.¹⁸

15 Anonymous respondents, Focus group interviews by Anne Speckhard & Fares Braizat near Irbid, February 12, 2017.

16 NCTC Director Nicholas Rasmussen testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security. See <https://homeland.house.gov/files/documents/02-11-15-McCaul-Open.pdf>. The Soufan Group report dated 2015 estimates the number to be between 27,000-31,000, available at http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_Foreign-FightersUpdate3.pdf

17 Peter R. Neumann, “Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s,” International Center for the Study of Radicalization, January 26, 2015, available at <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s>

18 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016). Also, note that, according to some sources, the Jordanian government estimates are that as of 2015, 500 of the foreign fighters have been killed while 500 have returned. See Suha Ma'ayeh, “Islamic State Lured a Son of Jordan's Elite,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 1, 2015, available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-lured-a-son-of-jordans-elite-1449015451>

A retired security official cited Jordanian excellence in penetrating terror groups being on par with the Israelis, complicated matters by claiming the current numbers of Jordanian foreign fighters to be at 3000, with the caveat that up to a third of these are working undercover. The official noted that Osama bin Laden was convinced that any Jordanian trying to join them was a spy and that he would not allow even Jordanian al-Qaeda ideologue Maqdisi into their training camps.¹⁹

However, another Jordanian retired military intelligence officer denied such claims, stating, “We do not have infiltration of ISIS. The GID could not find where our pilot was... they were moving him.”²⁰

Table One: The Middle East Foreign Fighter Breakdown by Country

Ranking	Country	Number of Foreign Fighters		
			Ranking	# of foreign fighters (on a per capita basis/ per million)
1	Saudi Arabia	1,500-2,500	3	69
2	Jordan	1,500-3950 ¹	1	309
3	Lebanon	900	2	201
4	Israel/Palestinian Territories	120	4	26
5	Yemen	110	8	5
6	Kuwait	70	5	20
7	United Arab Emirates	15	9	2
8	Qatar	15	7	7
9	Bahrain	12	6	9

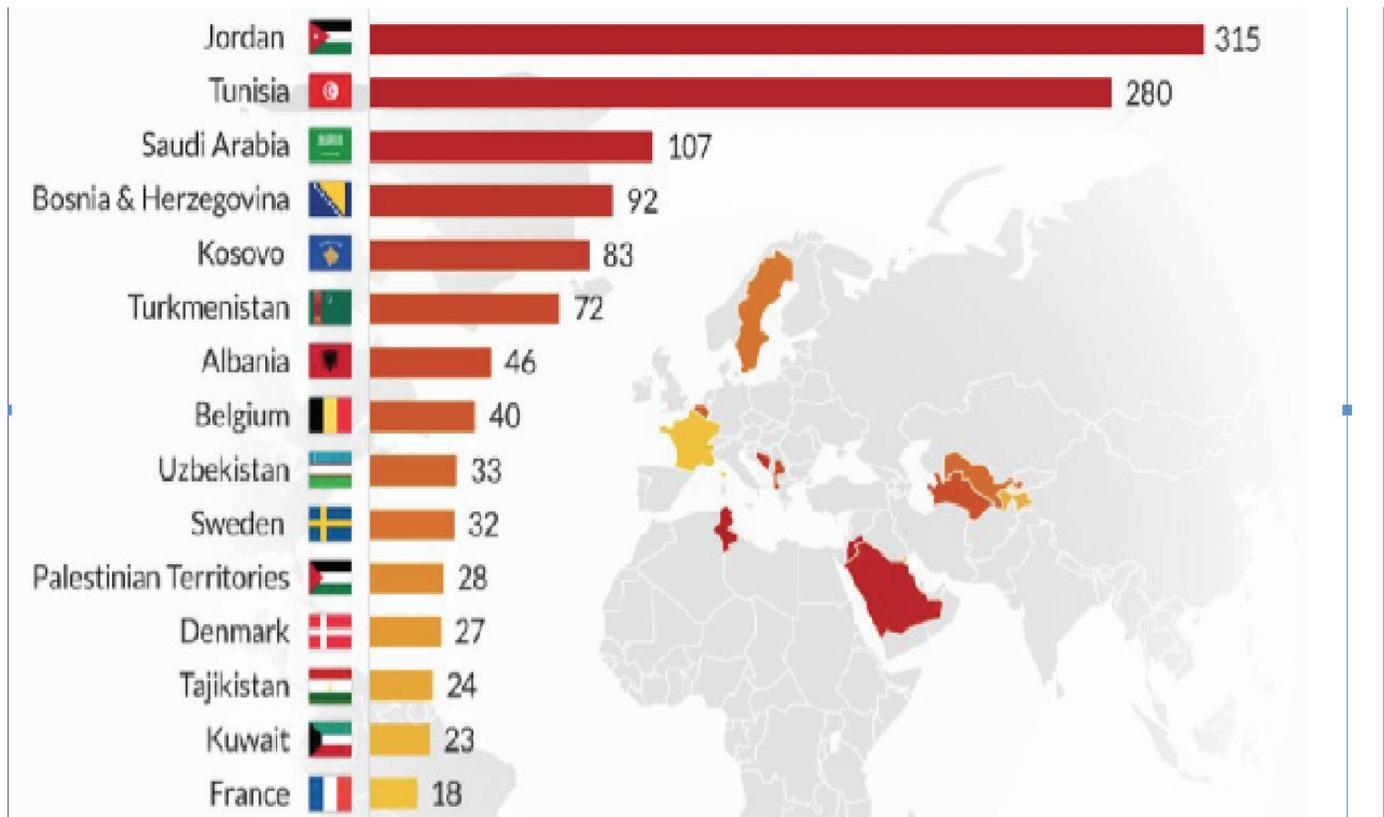
Source: ICSR and The Soufan Group (2015).

19 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

20 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

Of greatest concern to Jordan are those returning from the conflict zone, weapons trained and ideologically indoctrinated. Jordan forbids foreign fighter returnees at this point, some even claiming that border guards have orders to shoot them.²¹ Those who have returned are prosecuted and imprisoned, with some taking part in prison rehabilitation programs.²² Between 100 to 500 are said to have returned, meaning that more than 1,000 are still believed to be active in the conflict zones and could at some point attempt to return, or aim their sites on Jordan.²³

Table Two: Estimated Numbers of Fighters per capita in 2015 (per million people)



Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Most of the Jordanians who went as foreign fighters are men, although some women have also gone. Two women are said to have returned. Jordanian foreign fighters represent the full spectrum of socio-economic groupings, although the, most are said to be from impoverished backgrounds and underemployed or unemployed. Exceptions include some from successful careers and prominent families: one a pilot, and two sons of a Parliamentarian, one dying there.

21 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

22 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

23 As mentioned previously, estimates are that more than 3,000 Jordanians have already traveled into the conflict zones. Many of the interviewed pointed out the government's reluctance to share official counts. Counter-terrorism expert, Hasan Abu Hanya, said 250 returned; Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan November 10, 2016;

A retired officer from Military Intelligence said, 500 had been killed; Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016); A retired security official stated that 855 terrorists from Jordan were killed in Mosul and south Syria; Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016)

The sons of Jordanian generals have also joined.²⁴ Most foreign fighter recruits are said to be religious, with some already involved in militant jihadi movements. Exceptions to this also occur. One interviewee shared the story of a nonreligious fighter who was a “lover of adventure and came back as a Scotch drinker.” Some “were “failed protestors.” A respondent explained, “When the Arab Spring here failed, they wanted peaceful changes and were desperate for changes. Some who joined the Syrian foreign fighters were leftists; for example, a 22-year-old male, who was in the leftist movement in Jordan and took part in Arab Spring protests who died in Syria.”²⁵

Given Jordan shares an extensive border with Syria, it allowed for the easy mobilization and movement of foreign fighters from Jordan into Syria. The involvement of Jordanian foreign fighters in the Syrian and the Iraq conflict occurred at different times. According to security officials, the first wave of Jordanian foreign fighters are believed to have arrived during the early onset of the Syrian conflict and joined Jabhat al-Nusra. The second and the largest wave of foreign fighters from Jordan are believed to have arrived following the consolidation of ISIS in early June 2014 and the ISIS capture of the city of Mosul in Iraq. This is also a time when the “Caliphate” was officially proclaimed. It is believed that only a small number of Jordanians have managed to travel to Syria and Iraq following the proclamation of their “Caliphate,” in part due to effective government safety and security measures.²⁶ While some of the first joiners returned by the end of 2013/early 2014—after having witnessed the harsh realities of the conflict on the ground and seeing that the emerging militant jihadi groups were beginning to fight each other as they vied for ascendancy and power—others started joining terrorist groups that emerged during those years, such as ISIS and al-Nusra.

“In their December 2015 issue of *Dabiq*, an online ISIS journal, ISIS praised Zeid as one of the martyred ‘lone’ knights of the Khilāfah.”

Counter terrorism researcher Hasan Abu Hanya explained, “Of those who went to Syria, they were divided between al-Nusra and ISIS. They did not go to FSA, Ahrar al-Sham, etc. but stayed with the Salafi groups.”²⁷ Likewise, journalist Tamer Samadi reported that after ISIS declared its “Caliphate” in 2014, 85% of the militant jihadist community switched their allegiance to ISIS.²⁸

Recruitment of Jordanians occurred through both social media and in face-to-face recruitment. Of the foreign fighters from Jordan, only a handful are thought to be women, although one

24 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November, 2, 2016).

25 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

26 WANA Conference discussion with panelists, Amman, Jordan (November 2016).

27 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

28 Mona Alami, “Jordan’s Salafists Switch Allegiance to IS,” *al-Monitor*, April 20, 2015, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/jordan-amman-is-nusra-militants-salafi-jihadists.html>

researcher claimed there were more. One woman was said to have been recruited by another female through social media.²⁹

Violent Extremist Acts inside Jordan

As discussed in the preceding sections, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi although outside the country, was able to incite terrorist acts inside Jordan, such as plotting the January 2000 millennium attacks in Amman, plotting the 2004 attacks to unleash disastrously lethal chemical agents at multiple targets in Amman, and organizing the successfully carried out nearly simultaneous suicide bombings in 2005 in three hotels in Amman that killed sixty people.³⁰

Since then, ISIS has also inspired and tried to carry out attacks inside Jordan. On November 9, 2015, 28-year-old Jordanian police captain Anwar Abu Zeid used a machine gun to kill two American security contractors, a South African security contractor, and two Jordanians at the King Abdullah International Police Training Center near Amman. Four Jordanians, two Americans, and one Lebanese citizen were also wounded. Abu Zeid, who worked as a trainer at the center, was shot and killed by Jordanian security forces. Government officials denied that Abu Zeid was radicalized, citing mental health and financial stressors. However, the evidence shows that Abu Zeid shouted, ‘Allahu Akbar!’ as he carried out his attack, and afterward, his family called him a “victim and a martyr.”

“Jordan is part of a region that is on fire, packed with terrorist organizations.”

Likewise, during Abu Zeid’s funeral, thousands of mourners chanted “Death to America, Death to Israel.” Twitter accounts also erupted in celebration of the killings, praising Abu Zeid as a “martyr” and calling for more lone wolf attacks against Americans and Jordanian officials.³¹ The attack took place on the tenth anniversary of the al-Qaeda hotel bombings. In their December 2015 issue of *Dabiq*, an online ISIS journal, ISIS praised Abu Zeid as one of the “martyred ‘lone’ knights of the Khilāfah.”³² Security officials also admitted that other earlier plots to attack the facility had been thwarted.³³ Of note was that Abu Zeid was a member of one of the tribes usually supportive of the King.³⁴

29 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

30 Jonathan Finan and Craig Whitlock, “Zarqawi’s Network Asserts It Launched Attacks in Amman,” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2005, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/10/AR2005111002074.html>

31 MEMRI, “Jihadis Celebrate Killing of Americans in Jordan, Call Upon ‘Lone Wolves’ to Emulate It,” *MEMRI*, November 9, 2015, available at <https://www.memri.org/jttm/jihadis-celebrate-killing-americans-jordan-call-upon-lone-wolves-emulate-it>

32 See for instance *Dabiq* available at <https://archive.org/download/DabiqMagazine12/Dabiq%20Magazine-12.pdf>

33 Suleiman al-Khalidi, “Jordanian Officer Shoots Dead Two Americans, One South African At Security Training Site,” *Reuters News*, November 9, 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-jordan-shooting-idUSKCN0SY19G20151109#AoZSjeF2bbObgTu7.97>

34 Suleiman al-Khalidi, “Jordan Says Mass Killer Was Mentally Disturbed, Not a Jihadist,” *Reuters News*, November 14, 2015, available at Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-jordan-idUSKCN0T-31CY20151114#GrkvYwYYgUPKw9zp.97>

On March 1, 2016, Jordan also witnessed a seventeen-hour gun battle in the northern city of Irbid, following a two-week operation to take down a cell plotting terror attacks of both civilian and military sites in Jordan. Seven of the homegrown terrorists, said to be following ISIS, were killed and some were wearing explosive belts. Automatic weapons, explosives, and detonators were all found at the scene. According to Jordanian security forces, it was deemed the most significant terrorist-related incident in a decade with destabilizing elements having “managed to establish themselves and amass strength even under the heavy scrutiny of the country’s security services, widely seen to be among the most effective in the region.”³⁵

A Jordanian researcher explained, “It was an ISIS, 21-person cell. They were going to bomb Yarmouk, an Irbid university, and a hospital, as well as different targets in the north of Jordan. They caught them by noticing that a Palestinian guy who was married with a family moved from place to place in Irbid. There was a home and most of his friends were staying with him. People began to wonder if he’s married why does he come to this apartment? He was very polite, very friendly, and nice, but strange. Until the zero hour they were shocked. They bought guns, not just pistols. They were making bombs. They were shot and burned with fire. The terrorists killed an officer and their dogs. One of the terrorists is now in front of the court. He admits that it’s ISIS.”³⁶

On June 6, 2016, five Jordanian intelligence officers were shot and killed in another terrorist attack near the Al Baqa’a Palestinian refugee camp close to Amman.³⁷

Then only weeks later, on June 21, 2016, six Jordanian soldiers were killed and fourteen were wounded after a

car bomb exploded near the Syrian refugee camp of al-Rukan.³⁸ ISIS claimed the second attack, stating they were targeting the “American-Jordanian al-Rukban military base”.³⁹ According to a retired military intelligence officer, “they had a FSA car that we had given them.”⁴⁰

On September 26, 2016, the first religiously motivated political assassination occurred in Jordan. Jordanian journalist Nahed Hattar was shot multiple times in the head and killed outside an Amman courtroom. Hattar was facing charges for sharing an ISIS cartoon that many deemed as offensive to Islam.⁴¹ According to his journalist friend Ranya Kadri, Hattar “stayed four

“This is a stark example of how ISIS propaganda is penetrating hearts and minds of people.”

35 Sara Elizabeth Williams, “The Enemy Within: Jordan’s Battle With Homegrown Terrorism,” *Middle East Eye*, March 2, 2016, available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/enemy-within-jordans-battle-stop-home-grown-terrorism-481722991>; Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

36 Khawla al-Hasan Hassan, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

37 Aljazeera, “Jordan Intelligence Agents Killed Outside Baqa’a Camp,” *Aljazeera*, June 6, 2016, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/jordan-intelligence-agents-killed-attack-amman-160606084218947.html>

38 Mona Alami, “Jordan’s Salafists Switch Allegiance to IS.”

39 Aljazeera, “ISIL Claims Responsibility for Jordan Border Attack,” *Aljazeera*, June 27, 2016, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/isil-claims-responsibility-jordan-border-attack-160627044348399.html>

40 Khawla al-Hasan Hassan, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

41 Aljazeera, “Jordan: Nahed Hattar Shot Dead Ahead of Cartoon Trial,” *Aljazeera*, September 26, 2016, available at Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/09/jordan-nahed-hattar-shot-dead-cartoon-trial-160925080745317>.

weeks in prison. There were public threats saying, ‘I am so and so and I challenge and order the regime to make a public court case of him or I will personally take his heart out.’ A doctor announced, ‘I will pay 2000 JDs for his head.’”⁴² Following this incitement, Hattar was not given police protection and was later shot by a man described as “an Islamist.” Kadri stated, “This was the first political religious assassination in Jordan, ever. There was never a religious one before in Jordan. He was assassinated in broad daylight in front of his two sons and two brothers. This is a stark example of how ISIS propaganda is penetrating hearts and minds of people.”⁴³

Dr. Waleed Sarhan, a Jordanian psychiatrist, commented, “Many people say he deserved it, why should he insult Allah? But he didn’t insult Allah, he shared a cartoon about ISIS.”⁴⁴ Hattar had authored an article in 2006-2007 in which he reported on the Syrian intel’s response when he questioned them about the dangers of allowing Abu Jannah of al-Qaeda to recruit foreign fighters to go into Iraq. “It’s under control,” he was told by the Syrians. Nahed used this statement as the title of an article in which he warned the Jordanian government not to toy with “Under Control” because they, too, could lose control, as happened in Syria.⁴⁵

“Many people say he deserved it, why should he insult Allah? But he didn’t insult Allah, he shared a cartoon about ISIS.”

Following Hattar’s assassination, three U.S. Special Forces soldiers were shot dead as they entered the gate of Jordanian Prince Faisal airbase in al-Jafr on November 4, 2016. At first, some, including the U.S. Embassy in Jordan, expressed concern that the Jordanian soldier was radicalized and intended to assassinate the American forces, as initial Jordanian reports that the U.S. military men failed to follow orders was not born out by examination of video recordings of the incident.⁴⁶ Substantive joint investigations however, found no evidence of radicalization on the part of the shooter.

On December 18, 2016, four gunmen attacked a police patrol in al-Qatranah, a village 40 kilometers from Karak. The attackers also overtook a “Crusaders” castle where they held several tourists hostage and fired at another police patrol and the police station below them. Before midnight, Jordanian forces killed the gunmen and freed their hostages, but ten people were left dead, including 7 Jordanian security officers and 34 wounded. ISIS claimed responsibility.⁴⁷

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42 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

43 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

44 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

45 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

46 Peter Baker, Mark Mazetti & Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Investigates Deaths of 3 Soldiers in Jordan As Possible Terrorism.” *The New York Times*, November 16, 2016, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/17/world/middleeast/jordan-us-soldiers-killed.html>; Anonymous, U.S. military leader, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 14, 2016).

47 Ralph Ellis, Jomana Karadsheh & Angela Dewan, “Jordan Says 10 Killed in “Cowardly Terrorist Attack,” *CNN*, December 18, 2016, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/18/middleeast/jordan-shootout-security/>

After the attacks near Karak in December, Mohammed al-Momani, the Minister for Media Affairs, said Jordan “is part of a region that is on fire, packed with terrorist organizations,” although he also reassured that Jordan “will continue to be able to solidify its security and stability, and overcome this incident as it overcame other incidents in the past.”⁴⁸

“We are facing a Third World War against humanity,” Jordan’s King Abdullah wisely announced in November 2015, following the Paris attacks. “The world is facing another global conflict, and a fast response is needed to deal with the threat.”⁴⁹ Indeed, as violent extremist ideologies, groups, and their members spill over into Jordan from neighboring Syria and Iraq, it is important to consider the elements that go into making a terrorist and the support that Jordan may need to overcome threats of this type.

The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism

During two decades of in-depth interviewing over five hundred terrorists, violent extremists, their family members, close associates and even hostages, I found that terrorists are made, not born. From my experiences, I have found that the usual and necessary components to make a terrorist consist of: a group, its ideology, social support, and individual vulnerabilities and motivations which break out according to whether one lives in a conflict zone or outside of one.⁵⁰

Terrorist Groups Active in Jordan

In the case of Jordan, the primary groups operating and radicalizing Jordanians into violent extremism today are militant jihadi groups operating in Syria, mainly ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. That said, Palestinian terrorist groups have for years laid the groundwork for easy acceptance of al-Qaeda and ISIS ideologies.

“We are facing a Third World War against humanity.”

Ideologies Supporting Violent Extremism in Jordan

The ideologies of both ISIS and al-Nusra build upon the al-Qaeda claim that Muslims, Islamic lands, and even Islam itself is under attack. The same also claim that *all* Muslims, everywhere, are related to one another in the Muslim ummah and thus have an individual duty (*fard al-ayn*) to migrate to Muslim lands and fight jihad against both Western powers and local regimes who are viewed as Muslim oppressors by the terrorist groups. In the case of ISIS, there is the added declaration of having established in 2014 an Islamic “Caliphate” that is portrayed

48 Ibid.

49 Reuters, “Jordan’s King Abdullah: We Are Facing a Third World War,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 17, 2015, available at <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/ISIS-Threat/Jordans-King-Abdullah-We-are-facing-a-Third-World-War-434408>

50 Anne Speckhard, “The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism,” *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, February 25, 2016, available at <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/>

as a future utopian paradise in which all Muslims of all races and ethnicities are welcome as equals to come and live a traditional conservative Islamic life under shariah law. They are to come to build the “Caliphate” and fight the apocalyptic End Times battle. Purpose, meaning, honor, significance, adventure, justice, and belonging are all promised benefits to be construed upon joiners. Likewise, ISIS promises to reward all foreign fighters who come with the material benefits of free housing, cars, wives, and sex slaves, as well as the spiritual rewards of “martyrdom” for those who die in service to the Islamic State.

According to GID sources, there are few on-the-ground recruiters inside Jordan for either al-Nusra or ISIS. However, the pro-al-Qaeda ideologues Abu Qatada and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi are both living in Jordan and are active on social media platforms, as well as living freely outside of prison, although both are strongly monitored by intelligence. Some even speculate that they are being used by intelligence in exchange for their freedom.⁵¹

Terrorist recruitment takes place on-line, as both groups, and ISIS especially, have mastered the art of casting a huge net of thousands of slick and well-made propaganda videos and posters put out on social media to which they carefully follow the responses. They swarm in and contact anyone who retweets, likes, or otherwise endorses their materials, at first offering to meet their needs, and then, like any good cult, overtaking the individual as they bring him or her into the group. ISIS recruiters also troll the Internet looking for sympathizers and those with troubled lives to contact and try to seduce into the group.

ISIS has its online magazine *Dabiq* while al-Qaeda has *Inspire*. Both argue for migration to the battlefield and individual duty to fight jihad and they both incite extremist violence in acts of homegrown terrorism. ISIS adds to this line of argumentation that they have already declared

“The usual and necessary components to make a terrorist are: a group, its ideology, social support, and individual vulnerabilities and motivations which break out according to whether one lives in a conflict zone or outside of one.”

an Islamic “Caliphate;” therefore, “all true Muslims” are obligated to migrate and do battle on behalf of expanding it over the globe.

[Social Support for Violent Extremism in Jordan](#)

In 2015, Reuters reported that diplomats and analysts in Jordan estimate that there are 6,000-7,000 jihadi sympathizers inside the country.⁵² Four areas in Jordan have been identified by experts as hotbeds of radicalization:⁵³

1. Rusaifa (in Zarqa district) is the hometown of al-Qaeda ideologue, Maqdisi and Zarqa, Jordan’s sec-

51 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

52 Nakhoul, S., & al-Khalidi, S. (February 26, 2015). Insight: Jordan takes no chances in confronting homegrown Jihadis. *Reuters News*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-jordan-insight-idUSKBN-0LU1TU20150226>

53 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

ond-largest city, is the birthplace of al-Qaeda in Iraq's leader, Zarqawi.

2. Irbid, according to Kirk Sowell, a longtime follower of the Jordanian Salafist movement is, and has been, for years, "an area where IS—and not the Nusra Front—has been strong." According to Sowell, "The key leaders in Zarqa and Mafraq have gone over to the Nusra wing of Salafi jihadist thought, but in Irbid the dominant ideology is IS, not al-Qaeda."⁵⁴ Two of Jordan's most prominent IS supporters are from Irbid: radical cleric Omar Mahdi Zeidan, who was last seen in Mosul, and Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi. Tahawi is reported to have a strong following amongst Palestinian Jordanians in particular.
3. Ma'an
4. Salt

Cities such as Zarqa, Irbid, Ma'an, and Salt have produced the majority of the Jordanian fighters who have joined the Syria and the Iraq conflict. In the cities of Ma'an and Zarqa, also the two largest cities in Jordan—second only to the capital of Amman—one cannot help but notice how poverty and underdevelopment can make its inhabitants receptive to radicalization and extremism. In Zarqa specifically, as a city that shelters, since the 50's, Jordan's largest community of those of Palestinian descent—one could easily see how high levels of unemployment, criminality, and the overall economic neglect adds to frustration among the masses.

Social support for violent extremism in Jordan has a long history in the making as outlined at the beginning of this report. One aspect of radicalization in Jordan that should not be overlooked is the widespread support for violent Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation, including the use of suicide terror attacks. It is common to hear Jordanians of Palestinian descent in Jordan, argue that attacks in Israel that target civilians are not terrorism but legitimate resistance to occupation. Such arguments, unfortunately, pave the way for acceptance of the brutality of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS that also argue that suicide operations aimed at civilian targets are a form of Islamic "martyrdom" to be glorified, and a legitimate way to fight towards a desired political outcome.

“Four areas in Jordan have been identified by experts as hotbeds of radicalization.”

Survey research looking at how Jordanians perceive terrorist groups reveals that many do not see movements such as al-Qaeda as terrorist movements at all. For instance, in April 2004, Fares Braizat carried out a series of repeated population surveys revealing that respondents representing 67% of all Jordanians defined al-Qaeda as a legitimate resistance movement. However, that support precipitously fell to 20% in November of 2005 when Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq bombed three hotels in Amman.⁵⁵

54 Sara Elizabeth Williams, "The Enemy Within: Jordan's Battle With Homegrown Terrorism,"

55 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci "Determining Youth Radicalization in

In 2005, al-Qaeda in Iraq was defined by 95% of Jordanian respondents as a terrorist organization. Yet, 5% of survey respondents, representing 250,000 Jordanian citizens, claimed that al-Qaeda in Iraq was not a terrorist organization. Similarly, 84% of the survey respondents in 2004 defined Hezbollah as a legitimate organization. That number, however, dropped to 64% after Hariri was assassinated, and even further to 40% during Hezbollah's interventions in Syria, reflecting growing sectarian sentiments. Recent results show only a 20% endorsement rate.⁵⁶

The good news for Jordan is that the trend since 2004 is for the general population to be less supportive of violent extremist movements, reflecting a general realization that they have gone beyond what mainstream people would accept in terms of violent actions. However, social support for terrorist groups and violent extremism waxes and wanes with political shifts, particularly in regard to one's view on security.

For instance, in 2006 during the war with the Israelis, Jordanian's endorsement for Hezbollah increased again for some time.⁵⁷

“In the Arab world the question should be, ‘Why don't they become extremists?’”

According to recent survey research on radicalization in Jordan, 7% of Jordanians (representing 290,000 Jordanians) are credited with endorsing violent extremist groups. This rate has stayed steady since 2010 with endorsement rates for ISIS at 3%, al-Qaeda at 2%, and al-Nusra at 2%. The endorsement rates for these groups also waned in response to political events. For instance, the overall endorsement rate of 7% waned to 3% when ISIS released their video showing their burning to death of downed Jordanian fighter pilot, Moath al-Kasasbeh, in February of 2015.⁵⁸

When the survey data was examined to understand better the profiles of the 7% of Jordanians who usually endorse violent extremists and terrorist groups, it was found that they are more than likely to be 18-24 years old, males, living in urban areas, belonging to families spending 800 JD a month (i.e. middle class), have a university or advanced education, and often Jordanians of Palestinian origins.⁵⁹

A recent survey of 840 youth in face-to-face interviews took place in three different Jordanian districts of central Zarqa, Irbid, and Tafilah, each with its own expectations of radicalization. In Zarqa, 4.5% of youth stated that ISIS is close to their personal convictions whereas 2.7% said al-Qaeda represented their personal convictions. Whereas in Irbid 1.5% endorsed ISIS and another 1.5% endorsed al-Qaeda. No one endorsed ISIS in Tafilah and al-Qaeda received a 2.4% endorsement.⁶⁰

Jordan.” Manuscript under revisions for *Perspectives on Terrorism*, March, 2017.

56 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

Interestingly, endorsement of ISIS increased by monthly family income as did of al-Qaeda, lending some support to a widely accepted counter-terrorism view that moderately to well off persons have more resources, time, and ability to be concerned with social and political issues that terrorist groups purport to address, and as a result relatively better off persons are more likely to be involved and seduced into terrorist groups and their ideologies than those who are impoverished and consumed with meeting basic survival needs.

Among the approximately 2% of youth endorsing ISIS and al-Qaeda in Jordan, the endorsement rates were relatively even between males and females. ISIS endorsement decreased with age, with twice as many (3.1%) of 16-19 year-olds endorsing compared to 1.4% of 24-26 year-olds, but it increased in the higher age group for endorsement of al-Qaeda. Endorsement rates increased with education beyond the high-school level again following accepted counter-terrorism views that more educated youth, particularly those in universities, are often more passionate about social change and more likely to involve themselves in violent extremism.⁶¹

“7% of Jordanians (representing 290,000 Jordanians) are credited with endorsing violent extremist groups.”

Individual Vulnerabilities and Motivations for Violent Extremism in Jordan

The involvement of Jordanians in the Syria and the Iraq conflict, as well as in homegrown terrorist plots, occurred as a result of terrorist groups and their ideologies and the social support they are able to garner resonating with individual motivations and vulnerabilities. In the case of Jordanians, there are many such motivations and vulnerabilities operating on the individual level.

When asked about the drivers of radical extremism in Jordan, researcher Hasan Abu Hanya answered, “When I go to Europe or when I first begin my speeches, the question I am often asked by the people in the West is, ‘Why do people become extremists?’ But in the Arab world the question should be, ‘Why *don't* they become extremists? In the Arab world, there are political motivations. The economic situation is worse than in the Western world. There is no security. We have the Palestinian issue, sectarianism, oppression, corruption and abuses of power. I love when people ask why? Why this person who is oppressed, marginalized, suffers from poverty, and social injustice—why is he *not* an extremist?”⁶²

Humanitarian, Heroic and Altruistic Motivations for Joining Jihad in Syria

For the first wave of Jordanian foreign fighters to Syria, humanitarian reasons were the most commonly reasons for joining the conflict cited by experts. Many Jordanians have strong affinities and even family ties in Syria, and were deeply concerned with Assad’s attacks on what began as peaceful demonstrations. As the conflict in Syria took on sectarian notes, Jordanians,

61 Ibid.

62 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

who are mainly Sunni, were angered and deeply identified with Syrian Sunnis as their “brothers and sisters.” In this sense, they identified with the Syrians on a religious basis, from common experience and on an actual or “fictive kin” basis—feeling a deep and strong responsibility to go and fight in their defense. A Jordanian researcher stated how one respondent told her about saving people from Assad, specifically stating, “Our terrorism as Sunnis, is to defend our brothers.”⁶³

The strong resonance among Jordanians for those fighting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and later the U.S. occupation in Iraq also created a deep vulnerability in Jordan to jihadi movements. Mahmood Latif, an Iraqi from Anbar who fought as an insurgent against the Americans in 2003-2005, then joined the Awakening, and is now part of a peaceful resistance, shared the common sentiment: “At the same time, there is a very important difference between terrorism and extremism that goes toward civilians and innocents—that in our religion is a crime that cannot be forgiven, and between a group that goes out to defend its country to get rid of occupier from its land. This is not terrorism, and all traditions and laws, and all countries recognize this. An example is when a tyrant puts a knife on someone’s neck. When that happens, naturally, his legs have to kick. This is the occupation or an oppressive dictator. He puts the knife on our neck and blames us because our legs are kicking.”⁶⁴

“The ability and mastery of groups in Syria to utilize social media to vividly portray the conflicts in Syria to those living outside the conflict zone cannot be underestimated.”

The ability and mastery of groups in Syria to utilize social media to vividly portray the conflicts in Syria to those living outside the conflict zone cannot be underestimated as a strongly motivating factor for Jordanians to become foreign fighters. Jordanians could see in nearly real time what was happening in Syria due to the ability with social media and mobile phones for ordinary Syrians, and what later became organized militias and later terrorist groups, to broadcast videos and images from inside Syria. Jordanian Sunnis, already sensitized to sectarian atrocities that had occurred in Iraq after Zarqawi unleashed his attacks on the Shia and Shia militias retaliated in kind, felt strong sympathy and anger at seeing these images of Assad’s atrocities and some were easily activated to mobilize in behalf of their Sunni “brethren.”

A Ma’an activist recalled, “The videos coming at the beginning of the Syrian revolution, we were watching kids and women being killed and raped.” Continuing, he explained how this translated to a sense of “fictive kin” and duty to go and join the conflict. “We have all been raised on ‘those are our brothers.’ He’s going to defend his brother.”⁶⁵ “From a demographic point of view, Jordan has many links with Syria,” a Jordanian counter-terrorism expert noted.

63 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

64 Mahmood Latif, Iraqi former insurgent fighter and head of the political office to the groups of the Resistance in Anbar and Iraq, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

65 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

Even in Amman, there are Syrian families that have been here for a hundred years and feel closer to Syrians than Iraq probably.”⁶⁶

“Social media is creating lone wolves,” a retired military intelligence officer stated.⁶⁷ “They said watching ISIS propaganda is like watching an action movie,” a Jordanian researcher reported on her subjects talking about ISIS. “They knew this was manipulated media content, but they said it makes them feel sympathetic to fellow Syrians.”⁶⁸

“Some of the people thought there was a just cause, a regime that was killing people,” counter-terrorism expert, Hasan Abu Hanya stated of those who first left for Syria. “In mid-March 2011, it was first some months of peaceful demonstrations and the regime was killing harmless people. Then the cold

“Watching ISIS propaganda is like watching an action movie.”

regional games and sectarian divides started with the religious fatwas. We [Jordanians] started talking about injustices—that it was an Alawite and Iranian, Shia supported regime. Then it became religiously motivated with statements that Sunni Islam was being oppressed and dealt with in a bad way. The old jihadis that would go anywhere to fight jihad, saw an opportunity. But straight away when Jordanians went there it was before the split with al-Nusra and ISIS. Likewise, the ideologies were already created, and there were jihadis ready to go.”⁶⁹

Hijrah, Jihad, End Times Prophetic Thinking and the Call of the “Caliphate”

Since it declared its “Caliphate” in 2014, ISIS began promoting it as an ideal, utopian “Islamic State” where justice and prosperity would ultimately reign. ISIS also began announcing and promoting it as a place where Muslims of every race and ethnicity would be included and given significant roles, which created an unprecedented response, not only in Jordan but also worldwide. The terrorist groups’ propaganda and appealing narratives spread prolifically over the Internet, showing both the atrocities of Assad and the appeal of joining the End Times prophetic battle and building the “Caliphate,” alongside the spiritual and materialistic benefits accrued by doing so—thus creating a powerful, worldwide appeal. ISIS has managed to call the largest migration of foreign fighters ever to a battlefield. Estimates are that approximately 38,000 foreign fighters have left for Syria and Iraq—many to ISIS. Zarqawi’s earlier call to jihad with al-Qaeda in Iraq produced only 5000 foreign fighters, while the “jihad” in Afghanistan produced less than 2000 foreign fighters. Suddenly, tens of thousands were streaming into Syria from around the globe.

The ISIS invitation to jihad was successful for numerous reasons, including the advent of social media and the ability to cast an enormous propaganda net with immediate feedback as

66 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

67 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

68 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

69 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

to who liked, retweeted, and otherwise endorsed their materials, allowing ISIS recruiters to make contact with vulnerable individuals and seduce them into traveling to the battleground. A researcher talking to Jordanian youth about violent extremism reported that young men told her, “You don’t have to look for people; if you are lost someone will find you.” She explained of these youths interviewed in the four hotbeds of radicalization in Jordan, “They don’t have to do much. If, say, they are bored, they are contacted online. They will use the entry point of their weakness: love, money, and family.”⁷⁰ Similarly the author heard the same from youth in Zarqa who said, “Sometimes they play on your psychology, send messages. More than 100 messages can influence you.” While another said, “If you complain about your life on social media, ISIS contacts you.”⁷¹

ISIS propaganda very strongly promotes the individual responsibility of all Muslims to take hijra (migration to Islamic lands) as well as the individual duty to fight jihad (fard al-ayn). Likewise, ISIS also preaches *End Times* prophetic theology, citing the coming battles in Dabiq (Syria) and inviting all Muslims to join the ultimate apocalyptic battles.

“If you complain about your life on social media, ISIS contacts you.”

The ideological call is made to invoke a sense of duty while also promising materialistic and spiritual benefits (e.g. free housing, cars, food and propane allowances, the promise of marriage and sex slaves, and the rewards of “martyrdom” for those who die in battle, etc.) alongside the chance to live by what ISIS proclaims as a truly Islamic lifestyle under shariah law. It is one that resonates especially to Jordanians who strongly identified with the victims of Shia on Sunni sectarian conflict.

Likewise, the numbers of Jordanian leaders in the battlefield made clear that Jordanians could aspire to become prominent players in this “Caliphate,” which more easily facilitated the movement of Jordanians into the conflict zone. Among those Jordanians who have traveled to Iraq and Syria during recent years, or are currently engaged with ISIS in Iraq and Syria, it is clear that religious and ideological motives that invoked the struggle as jihad in the name of Allah and ideological motives that called for protection of all Muslims and the creation of an “Islamic State” were among their primary motivating factors.

An activist in Ma’an, a highly-radicalized community in southern Jordan, stated, “There is this religious feeling. The dream of the Caliphate exists among the people. The people always wanted the Caliphate. Here in Ma’an, we wait for shariah and dream about the uprising of the Islamic Nation to be like it was in the past. I’m in a situation in conflict about these ideas, what is related to politics and Islam, I cannot decide.”⁷² Researcher Hasan Abu Hanya concurred, “In June 2014 when ISIS took over Mosul and announced their Islamic Caliphate, all Muslims in

70 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

71 Zarqa Youth Focus Group Respondents, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard and Fares Braizat, Zarqa, Jordan (November 12, 2016).

72 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

the back of their mind wanted the Caliphate.”⁷³

ISIS lost some of its support in Jordan, when an ISIS propaganda film accompanied by the usual Islamic nashid [music] broadcast the grisly news that downed

Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kaseasbeh had been burned alive by ISIS. This barbaric act did not touch everyone the same, however. One researcher stated, “There is an important point to understand about ISIS. When ISIS burned Muath [the Jordanian pilot], even the music, it encouraged me. I listened to the music. It moves me from inside, even me. Music is like drugs. It touches a part of your brain, moves you, it makes you realize how they can attract people. Saudi dawah [Islamic teaching] videos are similar. They also make you come back to Allah, listen to Quran, and pray. Comparing to Daesh, [they engender] that feeling they use, how you can make other people cry.”⁷⁴

Jordanian psychiatrist, Waleed Sarhan also pointed out the confusion in Jordan that occurred when al-Kaseasbeh was burned alive by ISIS. Referring to commentary about it on his Facebook page he explained, “There were so many comments, with many people hinting that they would agree that there is a point in ISIS, and why not, if American can send planes without pilots to kill everywhere, we can send our young people to bomb and shoot everywhere? There were a lot of comments on Facebook in favor of ISIS, or, they at least, don’t object to it. I would follow some of them. It could be a university professor. Some would cite verses from the Quran, saying this is acceptable and what they do is okay. Some would say, Muath went to attack civilian Muslims so he should be punished by death.”⁷⁵ A Jordanian journalist remarked, “Some said that he should never have bombed Muslims fighting Assad.”⁷⁶

“In Jordan, we are noticing social ISIS,” Ranya Kadri, a Jordanian journalist noted, adding, “Young men and young women are embracing Takfir. ‘This guy is going to hell.’ ‘This is haram.’ It is evolving in words, the state of mind. It used to be only Jordanians of Palestinian origins; now it is mainstream Jordanians, and even the kids of prominent generals and Parliamentarians who have become extreme in their ideas. This is social spillover of Syria. They are not holding a gun. Not yet ready to die for it, but they are willing to hate in the name of Islam.”⁷⁷ She also noted, “We’ve started hearing a new sentence in Jordan; people among people who don’t want to fight saying, ‘I’m going to cut your head off.’ ‘I’m going to cut your heart out.’”⁷⁸

Speaking of how cleverly ISIS propaganda can work on even Jordanian youth who have

73 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

74 Khawla al-Hasan Hassan, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

75 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

76 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).).

77 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (October 14, 2016).

78 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

“The dream of the Caliphate exists among the people.”

everything, Huthaifa Azzam spoke about a former student caught in their snare, a thirty-one-year-old Jordanian American. “He was one of the most intelligent students. I taught him Islamic studies, Arabic language/linguistics, and English in high school. He liked me and visited me many times in my house. Weekly he used to come to me. That’s why I was shocked how they have convinced an intelligent young man like him. It means ISIS is using the most improved technology. They have very strong social influence. I could believe someone from Zarqa, [but not him]. His parents were secular, not religious. He wanted me to speak to them about Islam. His father had a very bad idea about jihad and jihadis, but I tried to tell him that al-Qaeda was not Islamic. He left to ISIS in June of 2015, during Ramadan. He didn’t tell his parents. He is a very rich and clever person. He studied IT. He went with his wife, whose family were Christians from Bethlehem, but she was born in the U.S. She converted. He took \$30,000 from his dad, and said he was going to start a business in Bethlehem. He sold the car that his father bought him in the U.S., and his mother gave him nine ounces of gold before he left. He took his wife and two kids, and another one was born in Iraq—only four weeks old now. When he got there, he communicated to his father via Internet, ‘I have been cheated. I saw their movies. What they are looking like in the movies and what I have been convinced of—when I went there I found something different.’ When ISIS came to understand that he is unconvinced they took him from Syria to Iraq, to Mosul [from where it’s much harder to escape ISIS]. This is while his wife was pregnant. He’s very clever, rich, and had everything, yet he was cheated [by ISIS] and convinced to take his wife and two small kids there.”⁷⁹

“In Jordan, we are noticing social ISIS.”

In November 2016, two short edited video clips of ISIS defectors denouncing the group were focus tested by the author in Zarqa, Jordan.⁸⁰ Youth watching the videos did not in any way question their authenticity and were disgusted and repulsed by most of the ISIS actions described by the defectors. However, in a group of forty-eight young people aged 14 to 26 many expressed that they also longed for an Islamic Caliphate to be established, although they were not sure if the ISIS “Caliphate” was the correct one. However, they did endorse ISIS’ brutal punishment of thieves saying that they were correct to enforce Islamic laws according to shariah principles. They also reflected that if they posted anything on social media despairing about the economic or political situation in Jordan or about their own lives, ISIS recruiters would respond to them in a seductive manner. This gives an idea of how groups like ISIS find a foothold in small crevices of unease, dissatisfaction and longing for Islamic ideals to peddle their version of

79 Hutfaifa Azzam Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 3, 2016).

80 The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) has interviewed forty-three ISIS defectors at this point, most on video, with the idea that raising the voices of former ISIS members to denounce the group is one of the most powerful ways to delegitimize both the group and its ideology. These interviews have been edited into short video clips placed on the Internet with pro-ISIS names to be used to delegitimize the group and its ideology and fight back against ISIS recruitment. See: Anne Speckhard, “The Best Weapon To Defeat ISIS: Use Testimonial from Disillusioned Recruits Who’ve Defected Against Them,” *New York Daily News*, July 6, 2016, available at <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/anne-speckhard-best-weapon-defeat-isis-article-1.2700282> and the videos at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCumpEsozixbl-PyKw12hmnw>

a violent solution.

“They found that democracy and peaceful ways are false,” a Salafi ISIS supporter interviewed for this project said, explaining that he would go and live in Islamic State if things stabilized. He defended them saying, “They are acting from the real hadiths of Prophet Mohammed, when he mobilized his armies to open the other countries he called them to religion. We might disagree with their methods; beheadings may be controversial/ I might agree with them or not, but they have a religious basis for it.” He continued, “Invading other countries is correct to protect Islam.”⁸¹

The Call of the “Martyrdom” Ideology

A study conducted in Ma’an, Jordan, in which sixty-two families of men aged 17-42 who had gone (n=54) or attempted to go (n=8) to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters, reported that many of the men had dreamt about “martyrdom” before going and were indoctrinated with this ideology in a space of two months to one year through social networks active on the Internet and in face-to-face encounters. Twenty-eight of them ended up getting killed—achieving their wish for “martyrdom.”⁸²

“It’s jihad.
You go to
paradise.”

Psychiatrist, Waleed Sarhan recounted one of his cases in which two twin males were convinced by propaganda to go to Syria. “One of my patients comes in every month. He has a barbershop. Both of his sons left school; they didn’t achieve anything. They work with their father. One day, the father was complaining about them, ‘Please doctor tell them not to go to Syria.’ I asked them, ‘Why do you want to go?’ The answer was ‘jihad.’ Yet, he doesn’t pray, doesn’t have any knowledge of jihad. He never touched a weapon. They were 19-years-old. I asked the imam in a nearby mosque to talk to them. Yet, in the morning, one had gone to Damascus. After three days, he was killed. Then I saw the brother. The brother wasn’t unhappy that his twin was killed. ‘You see, your bother has no military training and he doesn’t know who he’s going to fight with or against whom. Do you really know what’s happening in Syria? Do you pray? Would you do it, why?’ His answer, ‘It’s jihad. You go to paradise.’ The police also warned the second twin not to go. Yet, he went in two weeks and was also killed in a very short time.”⁸³

The power of groups to market “martyrdom” as a means of legitimately committing suicide in a glorious manner cannot be underestimated, as illustrated by another case from psychiatrist Waleed Sarhan in which even a non-Muslim was infected with this mentality. “I have a depressed cardiologist patient. He was stopped driving toward Syria by the Army, going to ISIS. They asked, ‘Where are you going?’ He told them, ‘To ISIS.’ ‘Are you Muslim to start with? Why do you want to go?’ they asked. ‘No I am not. I go to fight,’ he answered. They said they would take him to hospital, but he said he knew a psychiatrist to visit. In the first evaluation, he

81 Anonymous, Jordanian ISIS supporter, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

82

83 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

asked me, ‘Why did I decide to go to ISIS?’ He was not psychotic. He was a little depressed. He was 55, with young children, had small problems with his wife, drinking a bit, but nothing pathological. I asked him, ‘You work in the ICU. You could kill yourself with lethal drugs.’ If depressed, he knew about me. Why didn’t he come for treatment instead of going? Even Christians in the Middle East, they have Muslim influences in their minds, behave the same.”⁸⁴

Mental Illness

ISIS has also shown itself willing to instigate terrorist attacks using mentally ill people to carry them out. Unlike past terrorist groups that relied on cells to plan attacks and needed to trust in the mental stability and predictability of members they allowed into their cells, remote direction of operatives is now possible via encrypted social media platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp, and there is plenty of evidence that ISIS has used them to do just that. Mentally unstable individuals have been directed by ISIS to pick up guns, use vehicles, or otherwise carryout simple, yet lethal homegrown

terrorist attacks that likely end in their own deaths. In these cases, ISIS recruiters don’t care that the individual they direct toward his or her death, and the death of others is mentally ill, or will die in the attack. Indeed,

“He would rape people when punishing them. He was gay when he was a teen. He liked kids.”

their precursor organization, al-Qaeda in Iraq, especially when it was under heavy assault, was similarly cynical in its willingness to equip and send mentally handicapped women, who likely did not understand their mission, as suicide bombers inside Iraq.⁸⁵ As we have already seen such attacks in the U.K. and Canada, one can expect the same of ISIS in Jordan.

Even the ideologies of terrorism invade those with mental illness. “Now we see ISIS and al-Qaeda in schizophrenia, where it was Jesus coming back in the past,” a Jordanian psychiatrist explained.⁸⁶ Indeed, a recent crime by a mentally ill Jordanian young man beheading his own mother, likely in a drug induced state, having nothing to do with terrorist motivations, shows how the terrorist group likely has invaded group thought to engender even such acts of barbarity. Speaking about this crime, Jordanian psychiatrist, Waleed Sarhan explained, “The style of killing is something new. ISIS culture is invading everything, vocabulary and behaviors.”

Child Sexual Abuse

Similar to many parts of the world, child sexual abuse in Jordan remains one of society’s greatest taboos. “No one will speak about this, but we live in a situation of tribal abuse, children getting raped,” an activist working in Ma’an stated. “I watched them in the demonstrations. There are older guys who have a little one along with them. The others say, ‘This is your

84 Ibid.

85 Speckhard, A. (2009). Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Democracy and Security*, 5(1), 19-50.

86 Ibid.

son.’ But these children are not sons. They are victims of rape. It’s common in closed cultures where there are not interactions between men and women. The security forces know about the problem and tried to contact key persons in the community, the religious leaders. The director of intelligence called and asked them about this problem, ‘How you can give your kids to these people who we all know are molesting them?’ But there is a problem because they have a long beard and are trusted. They let them travel to Saudi with them and picnics here and there. This is a big problem. Imagine, the child ages 7-13; he is abused. They will do all of this bad stuff, rape, and then he is threatened by the evidence of being raped, ‘I will tell your father, your family.’ This child, when he grows up, when he is a teenager, he will need to revenge from anything in front of his eyes. When he’s 19-20, he will be looking for any way to have forgiveness from the community. The one who was abused searches for a way to get community forgiveness. He becomes a Salafi. The easiest way is to become a sheikh, and then he has community respect.” When asked about the extent of the problem, the answer was, “a very small number, about 1%.” Yet, that can map to the numbers in Ma’an who join violent groups like ISIS.⁸⁷

Zarqawi was also known to police and intel as a sexual predator. “His background was known,” a retired intel agent said. “He was a bit gay. He would rape people when punishing them. He was gay when he was a teen. He liked kids. Being gay is very forbidden and shamed in Jordan, especially when known that he came from a big tribe. It was very difficult even for the state to accuse him of this because of his tribe. In my view, that was one of the big mistakes of the state. We needed this piece of information, but it took us tens of years to use it. But local police files refer to it. He would be caught with a bunch of boys, especially Palestinian boys. Because he was aggressive, they wouldn’t resist him. I think there are confessions of people who were his victims. He was going after people of his own age as a teenager, not after little kids. Also, his performance as a man with his wife was not up to standard, his wife’s friend told us.”⁸⁸ A prisoner who was housed with Zarqawi for political opposition however disputes this claim, stating he never saw any signs of homosexuality and believes it was made up by the intelligence forces to discredit Zarqawi.⁸⁹

The same former security agent cited above confirmed that child sexual abuse is a problem in Ma’an, referring to the fact that Ma’an is on a transit route and that truck drivers imported “strange behaviors.” “Ma’an has a lot of gay people with psychological conflicts. This guy who works here comes from a religious home. Then he meets them, becomes gay, and uses drugs and alcohol. When he goes home, he lives a double life. This developed over the years, and his double identity is what creates terrorism,” the former security officer explained.⁹⁰ Indeed, those who are victims of sexual predation as children often grow up with many complexes, anger over

87 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

88 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016),.

89 Anonymous, Former Political Opposition Leader, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (February 9, 2017).

90 Ibid.

being molested and the need to compensate.⁹¹

Criminal Backgrounds and Cleansing from Sins

“Three to four types of people are joining ISIS,” Free Syrian Army fighter and ideologue, Huthaifa Azzam, explained. “People disappointed in their countries and with no hope in life. Some of them are very rich, but the majority has many common characteristics: they lost hope in life, have nowhere to go, and are a nobody in society. This guy is mostly, and has always been, far away from his religion and doing everything that is not allowed in Islam. Once he woke up, he wanted to turn back to Allah for redemption, and directly, before getting anywhere, this guy has been hunted by ISIS. Because of his bad past, he is isolated. He is socially unaccepted. Most of the ISIS people are like this, including their leadership.”⁹²

Indeed, Abu Musab Zarqawi who became the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq was a heavily tattooed thug from Zarqa who met his spiritual mentor, Maqdisi in prison. As one retired intel professional described him saying, “I was a gangster, then I found God.”⁹³

“If you look at those who conduct these attacks, they are clean converts and they are not educated much in the Islamic way. They are criminals,” a Jordanian retired officer from military intelligence noted, He has a criminal ideology and he wants to cleanse himself and delete his history, and wants to be a shaheed [“martyr”]. Most foreign fighters are criminals.”⁹⁴ The officer went on to tell of one of his experiences:

We arrested a Jordanian who was trying to infiltrate into Syria. We captured him during the Salafi-Takfiri attack on our police. He had stabbed a police officer in his back and rotated the knife in his body. I was a Special Forces commander, and I know; it means he was an expert. We were conducting raids to take him down. When he was captured, they brought him to me. He was tattooed on his hands and arms—it reflects his criminal past. In the Islamic way, they burn them off. He had taken them off by burning. He had a long beard and wore a short didasha [robe]. ‘What’s up sheikh?’ I asked him. ‘I think you have a bad history in your background. You look like you were a criminal.’ ‘May Allah guide you,’ he answered as I searched his profile in the police records. It turned out he had been in prison five years earlier, but had been released eventually, as we couldn’t get him convicted. He moved from criminal to extremist—it’s very dangerous. When we investigated him, we learned that he felt guilty in prison that he had participated in a crime. The Salafis in prison

91 See Mubin Shaikh’s story for instance: Speckhard, A., & Shaikh, M. (2014). *Undercover Jihadi: Inside the Toronto 18--Al Qaeda inspired, homegrown terrorism in the West*: Advances Press, LLC.

92 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 3, 2016).

93 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

94 Ibid.

recruited him by telling him, ‘If you want God to forgive you, memorize the Quran. Or, to make it easy, join us as a jihadi and, if you are killed in any operation, you will go to Paradise. He was in his late 40’s and couldn’t memorize the Quran, so he choses this. He had participated in a killing.

Fares Braizat of NAMA’s concured that there can be a “crisis of identity coupled with a criminal record,” but pointed out that an identity crisis and criminality by itself is not enough to create movement into violent extremism. There must be exposure to what Braizat calls, “a higher moral calling, an ideology, that is religious discourse,” and then they act violently. “Only then do they become convinced they are doing a good thing. They want to raise the flag of Islam and support Islamic State. To fly the shariah flag.”⁹⁵ The author found the same in hundreds of interviews of terrorists—exposure to a group and its ideology was necessary alongside whatever individual vulnerabilities existed, criminality, identity crisis or otherwise.⁹⁶

Mentally ill people and those in conflict zones often self-medicate to try to control their posttraumatic and other symptoms while drug users often end up with criminal records. A Jordanian psychiatrist noted this nexus of criminality, drugs and terrorism, “Now in ISIS, half of their income comes from drugs. They are taking amphetamines and planting cannabis. Heroin was the resource of OBL, and this one has cannabis. Syria never had a drug problem in the past, and neither did Iraq. Both now, are drowning in drugs; people are taking and smuggling them.”⁹⁷

“Jordan is [now] the kitchen of radicalization.”

For someone with a criminal history or mental illness, these groups can be attractive for conflicting reasons: that they promise to get you off of drugs and that there is the possibility to control and use drugs as one pleases.

The ability of Islam to turn a criminal from his past can affect others as well. A Jordanian of Palestinian descent who became a jihadi before ISIS emerged and is now an ardent ISIS supporter, recalled studying in the U.S. and becoming radicalized by Malcolm X. “He changed. The dawah [call to Islam] affected me. He changed his ways. His personality affected me. How he used to be, how he became a criminal, and then how he changed and developed [in response to converting].”⁹⁸

Huthaifa Azzam stated that when he interviewed leaders of Ahrar al-Sham who had been put in a Syrian prison in 2006-2007 under accusations of being al-Qaeda, they got a look at the real al-Qaeda and also found that they were criminals. Speaking to Azzam they said, “We were

95 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November, 2, 2016).

96 See: Speckhard, A. (2012). Talking to terrorists: Understanding the psycho-social motivations of militant jihadi terrorists, mass hostage takers, suicide bombers and “martyrs”. McLean, VA: Advances Press. and Speckhard, A. (February 25, 2016). The lethal cocktail of terrorism: the four necessary ingredients that go into making a terrorist & fifty individual vulnerabilities/motivations that may also play a role. *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism: Brief Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/>

97 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

98 Anonymous, Jordanian ISIS supporter, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

bewitched by al-Qaeda as the only people holding jihad in the world. They were like angels walking on earth. We had their movies and CD's and viewed them from far away. But when you live with them, [in prison] you find all these very dangerous criminals. This is not jihad. This is criminals with Islamic clothes, with the jihadi look."⁹⁹

Becoming a Hero

Speaking of the hotel bombings in 2004, psychiatrist, Waleed Sarhan stated that “two days before we had a survey about Abu Musab Zarqawi and 82% of young men liked him. This survey was done in west Amman. They are well off people. They want a hero. Yasser Arafat and Sadaam Hussain were heroes for people in the last 15 years. Now there are no heroes.”¹⁰⁰

This dearth of heroes was also noticed by Sulieman Bakhit who created a series of comic book super heroes, including *Element Zero* that fights terrorism and violent extremism.¹⁰¹ Bakhit stated that his heroes are Jordanians and fight terrorism in Jordan, but after creating them a huge social media debate erupted over whether or not Arab Muslims fighting Western powers could even be terrorists. To win the debate, Bakhit established a Facebook page for his superhero to insist to his fans that indeed Arab Muslims can be terrorists and that heroes fight terrorism.¹⁰²

“Heroes are people who will stand up to the U.S.,” psychiatrist Sarhan explained referring to the Jordanian mentality. “There is a hidden feeling against the U.S., that they are behind world tragedy, Israel, world problems and that no body cares about us. Aleppo, Mosul, if you look at TV; it's tragedy everywhere. We are not doing good enough. We have Zionist and Americans as the strongest force in the world, and if we cannot fight them as governments and armies, then we will go and bomb them.”¹⁰³

“The groom who lost his mother, wife and his mother-in-law to the wedding bombs organized by Zarqawi still speaks [on social media] of Osama bin Ladin as Sheik Osama,” Sarhan noted, showing the respect that even a victim of terrorism in Jordan shows to the violent extremists.¹⁰⁴

Identity Politics Influenced by Imported Streams of Salafi Islam and Militancy

Youth have a developmental task of separating from parents and consolidating their own sense of identity. In doing so, they often look outside their families to governmental and nongovernmental institutions—schools, mosques, and these days even the Internet—for role models and patterns and clues of who they should become. Meanwhile, the introduction of Salafi streams of fundamentalist Islam in Jordan amidst sectarian militant conflicts in neighboring countries has created strong identity politics with a sense of “in-groups” and

99 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 7, 2016).

100 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

101 See for example <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/01/15/377385882/in-jordan-the-comic-book-superheroes-fight-extremism>

102 Sulieman Bakhit (? , 2015) Personal communication.

103 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

104 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

“out-groups” divided along sectarian lines. For youth in search of an identity, this cauldron of identity politics and militancy, functions as one of the drivers into violent extremism.¹⁰⁵

“Jordan is [now] the kitchen of radicalization,” journalist Amer Sabayleh stated. “However, this was not always the case. Jordan was part of the Levant. In the forties and fifties, there was another model—of the Bedouin, who are not religious necessarily. At that time women were partners in the fields among Bedouin men. They didn’t hide themselves, and they took over the home as well. Traditional dances were with man, woman, man, woman, linking arms—so don’t tell me that they don’t shake hands,” Amer explained, referring to the spread of the Salafi practice among some Jordanians, in which men refuse to shake hands or otherwise touch women. “All the women were smoking pipes, both Bedouin and modern,” Amer noted. Indeed, the airport murals in Amman depict these traditional dances in which women are uncovered, dancing arm in arm with male partners.

“They made jihad a fascinating issue.”

Salafi streams of Islamic influence now disrupt these traditional ways, calling them into question as legitimate interactions between Jordanian men and women. Sabayleh explained, “If one travels back into time, sixty or more years, one would find Jordan looking very differently. Few women were covered and modern Western dress was common. Up to 1967, Jordanians did not fast during Ramadan. When you look at old school photos, the girls used to have mini skirts on. I can show you my mother in a miniskirt.” A retired Jordanian military intel expert concurred, “Jordanians prior to 1945 were so not conservative. They didn’t fast. All the men drank. Fundamentalist Islamic ideology is at its peak right now.”¹⁰⁶

Reflecting back to growing up in Zarqa, Sabayleh stated, “We had VHS videos in the 80’s. We all watched Italian movies. My school was behind cinema Zahran. We were all curious to see the European movies. Yet in 1993, the first terrorist operation was against a cinema in Zarqa,” he recalled, referring to when Jaysh Mohamed sent an operative to blow up the theater during the showing of a porn film.¹⁰⁷

“In the fifties, we had this regional issue. It related to the bigger global issue of the Cold War, pan Arabism, socialism, but then it turned to adopting a religious way. After 1957, the theocratic legitimacy of the monarchy coming from the Prophet was stressed and Jordanians began to participate with the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood was given the Education Ministry in the 50s, and they are the partner of the monarchy up to today. They completely changed the curriculum, including Palestinian and religious doctrine in it. As a result, society started to change, along with education and the role of mosques. Now every 200 square meters

105 As already stated, when Palestinian refugees from Kuwait entered Jordan and Afghan jihadis returned home, both brought Salafi interpretations of Islam with them. Likewise, as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries became oil rich, Salafi streams of Islam spread globally. As a result, a gradual shift began to occur across Jordan.

106 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

107 Ibid.

there is a mosque.”¹⁰⁸

According to Sabayleh, moderate Muslims in Jordan can today face harassment about sexuality, fasting, and so forth.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, a 2013 interview study carried out in Jordan with 850 teens by Cambridge University revealed a much different atmosphere today than described decades ago. It found that one-third of Jordanian teens condoned honor killings. Almost half of the boys surveyed, and one in five of the girls, thought it was justified to kill a woman who brought shame to her family. Their beliefs were anchored in patriarchal authority and dominance, and existed more in traditional families with low education.¹¹⁰ It is believed that around twenty honor killings a year occur in Jordan.

“Can you tell me who is Jordanian?” Sabayleh asked. “Even the Army is called the ‘Arab Legion,’ and our monarch says we are Hashemite. In actuality, the Jordanian identity is not strong and cannot contain everyone and cannot absorb all.”

Likewise, he stated that Jordanians Muslims now ignore their mixed roots with Christians, Yazidis, and Ismailis in the country, with the Jordanian Muslim identity becoming ever more fundamentalist, over time paving a path for embracing violent extremist solutions to political issues as well.¹¹¹

Journalist Ranya Kadri agreed on this point, stating that in the elite Amman school her children attended, she repeatedly had to confront teachers who encouraged the students to embrace the Palestinian “jihad,” and tried to shame them for not taking part. “The teacher was calling for jihad against the Israelis. She said, ‘Look at the days of the Prophet.’ My daughter spoke up and said, ‘But now Jordan has an Army and a King and it’s the King’s decision whether the Army fights or not, not us who decide.’”¹¹²

Sabayleh pointed out the radicalizing effects of the 1979 Iranian revolution and declaration of the Islamic state in Iran, as well as the “Holy Jihad in Afghanistan” and the 1989 creation of Hamas, as radicalizing influences. According to Sabayleh, one of the ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood, Abdullah Azzam, started recruiting for the Afghan jihad from Palestinian refugee camps. “I still remember the books they would distribute about miracles of jihad in Afghanistan. He brought [with him from his time in Afghanistan] a shirt with bullet holes and said he wore it and nothing happened. Streets and mosques today in Jordan are named after him.”

“In the 80s, the Muslim Brotherhood told that generation to go and fight the Russians in

“If a Jordanian is shown beheading in Syria, he was already trained here in Jordan.”

108 Ibid.

109 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

110 Laura Smith-Spark, “Third of Teens in Amman, Jordan, Condone Honor Killings, Study Says,” *CNN*, June 20, 2013, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/20/world/meast/jordan-honor-crimes-study/>

111 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016). The actual name today is Arab Army.

112 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

Afghanistan,” Sebayleh recalled, “but they wanted to fight for Palestine. However, they were told that the door of jihad is closed for Palestine now, so let us go and train ourselves in Afghanistan to be ready. They made jihad a fascinating issue. I started to hear ‘crusaders’ instead of ‘Christians’ and that made Christians enemies. I was told, ‘You should not go to a Catholic school,’ and was asked, ‘Do you have crusader friends?’”

Journalist Ranya Kadri explained how the sectarian killings in neighboring countries affected identity politics, “In July 2007, the [Sunni] Awakening and surge had already started. But when Maliki took control of Iraq in 2008, he targeted Sunni leaders, and then we saw that again in 2011, in the Syrian uprising. It deeply affected Jordanian mentality about Shia and Sunnis. Long ago, I didn’t even know if I was Shia or Sunni. I had to ask my parents. Now everyone is totally aware of this identity.” Indeed, whereas Jordanians in the past were more likely to rail against the Israeli perceived and real injustices against Palestinians, it is just as common now to hear complaints and fears voiced about perceived, and real, Shia injustices against Sunni Muslims.

Abu Qatada, a Jordanian ideologue of Palestinian origin and who is credited as the “spiritual father” of al-Qaeda in Europe, was interviewed twice for this project.¹¹³ Qatada embraces Salafi Islam and living under shariah law as the antidote to current societal ills, and believes that violent extremism is what will ultimately make the changes to what he believes will—like ISIS claims—usher in a more just Middle Eastern, if not world, order. Speaking of the many failed states—Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, among others—he claimed that governments in many nations will inevitably fall and change, “No country that is falling can come back. This is not good news for the West. Regimes are going to be spread out and more violence coming. This is the reality in the future. Usually, when there is more blood being spilt the inclination is towards finding a solution, but the reality is the more the problems there are, it is making men carrying ideologies that are more extreme. Blood and killings continue...”

Sabayleh underlined this, pointing out that messages that are not terrorism-related, but extremist nonetheless, are being broadcast throughout Jordanian society. “All the radio stations broadcast violent Army music about the region’s fake ethnic pride. These are sponsored by the Army,” he stated. “In the Army ceremony to start the war against Daesh, a red flag was raised, and they said it was the Hashemite Army. Then the head of the Army started saying he would cut the heads off the enemies of Jordan”¹¹⁴ Indeed, this reflects ISIS rhetoric.

“If a Jordanian is shown beheading in Syria, he was already trained here in Jordan,” Sabayleh claimed. “Hamman Said, the head of Muslim Brotherhood, said when he was under pressure, ‘If you don’t accept us our youth will join Daesh.’ So, see how their youth are already prepared to join Daesh.”¹¹⁵ A Jordanian journalist confirmed these threats to government from Islamist

113 Anne Speckhard, “Abu Qatada: The “Spiritual Father” of al-Qaeda in Europe reflecting on terrorism and the future of the Middle East as Trump takes the U.S. Presidency,” First interview by Anne Speckhard November 16, 2016, second interview February 13, 2017.

114 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

115 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

groups reporting, “Khaled Meshaal, head of Hamas, also told me if the Jordanian establishment and international community don’t recognize the Muslim Brotherhood, we will lose our followers to extremist groups like al Qaeda.”¹¹⁶

“We are not at all moderate,” Sabayleh explained, speaking of the changes that have occurred in Jordan over the past five decades. “Our people don’t accept others, don’t accept pluralism, we don’t tolerate others, Shia and Sufi for instance. We don’t accept others. We think we have the truth and others don’t have it.” Indeed the recent assassination of journalist Nahed Hattar, for posting an anti-ISIS cartoon on his Facebook account, underlined this point. And events like his killing are indicators of Takfiri teachings of groups like ISIS that teach that Muslims who do not adhere to their strict interpretations should be eliminated. While the Takfiri ideologies have not spread far into Jordan yet, intolerance has.

Abu Qatada, a Jordanian ideologue for al-Qaeda, stated that he is “happy to kill those who insulted the Prophet. Those who curse should be punished. We don’t ask anyone by force to change his convictions, but anyone who curses and insults should pay this price,” he said likening it to European laws against denying the Holocaust. “Those are your rules. We also have our rules; don’t curse our Prophet.”¹¹⁷

However, speaking of whether religion and culture are what fuels violent extremism, Hasan Abu Hanya argued, “It is opposite to what the orientalist thinks. Religion and the culture is what stops him. In religion and the culture, the value taught is to be patient, to be patient when it comes to oppression and poverty, to be patient with Allah.” Indeed, Salafi Islam can be protective against militant jihadi ideologies of groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda if taught in ways that denounce their call to violence in the name of jihad and Takfiri extremes (i.e. denouncing and allowing for killing Muslims and others who do not adhere to their strict interpretations of Islam). However, if it is not taught in this manner, Salafi streams of Islam can also provide a ready gateway into more extremist Takfiri streams of thinking and acting.

Given that groups like ISIS do not recognize the Sykes-Picot agreement and the national borders drawn by Europeans, and favor religious rather than national legal systems, then those in search of an identity and who are drawn into fundamentalist Salafi streams can also come to believe that they are not Jordanian, rather they are members of the Muslim ummah. Arguably, this then is only a step away from believing they are part of the “Caliphate” that ISIS has declared and must fight for it.

Youth searching to consolidate their identities in Jordan are subject to these many influences,

116 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

117 Anne Speckhard, “Abu Qatada: The “Spiritual Father” of al-Qaeda in Europe reflecting on terrorism and the future of the Middle East as Trump takes the U.S. Presidency.”

“The whole world is putting us between two choices: the hell of ISIS and fire of Iran. The Shia militias took the hearts of Sunni people. Why does the world give us this horrible choice?”

and those who are vulnerable or stressed by social and economic stressors may resonate to all or nothing solutions offered in fundamentalism and by violent extremist groups. In the case of ISIS, black and white thinking and a clear identity as a true and good Muslim are promised to those who travel to live under the “Caliphate,” thereby removing any questions for those searching for their identity.

While there is a strong anti-Western and anti-American sentiment among those who radicalize, it should not be mistaken as all pervasive in Jordan. A retired intel officer pointed out that most Jordanians are concerned about problems in Jordan, but nevertheless love their country and are loyal to it. He also made an important point about Jordan’s relationship with the West, “The majority of Jordanians believe our relationship with America is very important to Jordan for stability, support, cooperation, and the military on our north east border. The danger is so close to us. The Jordanians feel protected from Iraq and Syria by the Americans.”¹¹⁸ While speaking for most Jordanians, there are also those who don’t feel this way and who are angry at the West and Americans in particular for its foreign policy and military actions in Muslim countries.

Revenge and Honor Culture amidst Sectarian Politics

“The whole world is putting us between two choices: the hell of ISIS and fire of Iran. The Shia militias took the hearts of Sunni people. Why does the world give us this horrible choice?”¹¹⁹ Huthaifa Azzam, a Jordanian who fights with the Free Syrian Army asked.

As mentioned previously, from 2004-2006, Jordanian terrorist leader Abu Musab Zarqawi unleashed a virulent campaign of hatred and intolerance accompanied by a terrorist onslaught of suicide attacks aimed at the Shia population in Iraq. Iraqi Shia militias responded. In the ensuing years, barbaric murders in Iraq across the Shia/Sunni sectarian divide occurred, making it such a dangerous security situation that many Iraqis carried multiple mobile phones and ID cards identifying them as either Shia or Sunni to produce to whatever checkpoint happened to stop them.¹²⁰ This murderous sectarian fight occurring in Iraq unleashed by Zarqawi, has now invaded Sunni minds in Jordan as well.

“When Maliki cracked down on the opposition in Anbar, it set things off again,” Kadri recalled. The security vacuum for Sunnis in Anbar province to Shia attacks began to again give rise to terrorist groups. The honor culture is so strong among some that Kadri recalled one sheikh’s response to U.S. forces coming to arrest him in his home. “[Anbar resistance leader] tribal leader Mudher Kharbit was here in my house. He was at that time wanted by the U.S military. As he was being interviewed here in Amman, his son called from Anbar about the troops coming to arrest them. We all heard him tell his son over the phone, “I’m not coming back because if they arrest and humiliate me...” then we all got chilled to the bone as he instructed his son, ‘Once they get close to the house, you get the gun and kill your mother and sisters.’”

118 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

119 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 7, 2016).

120 Anonymous, Iraqi psychologist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard (July 2007).

We were all in shock, but Mudher told us, ‘Our children are important, but nothing is more important to us than our honor. If we don’t have honor, we don’t have life.’”¹²¹

“Now, we knocked on the door of sectarian conflict in Syria,” Kadri explained. “It encouraged the Sunnis in Jordan, which is all of Jordan, to embrace hate. In Iraq, it was not that strong. Zarqawi looked like a national figure, and while Jordanians condemned what he did in Jordan, the fighting against the U.S. occupation of Iraq was okay. Now it’s more of a religious war.”¹²²

In a NAMA organized focus group held in Zarqa, nearly half of twenty youth said, ‘Shia are not Muslims. When asked where they got such information, they responded that it was all from social media. When asked to show the researchers what videos they watched, they pointed to Salafi and Takfiri videos from Gulf countries, Iraq, and Syria.¹²³ Clearly, sectarian conflicts in the region are invading the thoughts of youth in certain enclaves in Jordan.

“If we don’t have honor, we don’t have life.”

“I’ll tell you something. I hate the Shia very much, they are devils very much. Anyone who fights the Shia is correct,” a Salafi ISIS supporter stated. “[If I was dying] I would not agree with being treated by a Shia. I would never take a blood transfusion from a Shia.”¹²⁴

“At the beginning, there were revolutions in the Arab Spring that reached Syria,” counter-terrorism research Hasan Abu Hanya explained. “When they reached Syria, there was a cold sectarian war going on between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states. This deep division between sects divided from Arab moderation and the resistance and this competition occurred when the revolution happened in Syria. There were fatwas from Saudi scholars to fight in Syria. Even the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan made fatwas to fight in Syria against the oppressor Assad, and the corrupt oppressor Alawites. A lot of people left Jordan without jihadi inclinations due to this encouragement, but once in Syria, they crystalized in their ideological inclinations because the jihadi groups have long experience in ideological propaganda and the way they organize. The structure itself. They absorbed it all. That’s where the changed happened, but most that went in the beginning from Jordan and elsewhere it was part of the sectarian divide had grown, a byproduct of the Sunni crisis unleashed [earlier in Iraq] by Zarqawi.”¹²⁵

“They wanted to protect the Sunni women from the Shia men that were raping them,” explained one journalist. “Mercy Corps used this, arguing it as a gender issue, but really it’s a mobilization tool to protect the Sunni symbolism of dignity against those Shia. It’s not about the women. It’s

121 Ranya Kadri Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

122 Ranya Kadri Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (October 14, 2016)

123 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkoveci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

124 Anonymous, Jordanian ISIS supporter, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

125 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

to mobilize them along sectarian lines.”¹²⁶

Concerns over Injustice, Corruption, Nepotism, and Loss of Confidence in Government Structures

Nearly every expert asked about the drivers of violent extremism in Jordan mentioned injustice and corruption. “The main driver to violent extremism in Jordan is social injustice and no possibilities. Lack of hope and the humiliation of knowing they cannot go forward,” Amer Sabayleh stated, referring to the high rates of youth unemployment, the perceived and real corruption, and nepotism that block the possibilities for many youth to advance. “Our country is filled with 70% youth. If they don’t participate in building their future, they lose the appreciation of their lives,” Sabayleh explained, underlining the vulnerability for young people to extremists who promise them another way of governance that offers possibilities for them.¹²⁷

“Overall, I think the situation now is far worse, financial status, morale in the Arab world, failed Arab Spring,” a Jordanian psychiatrist explained. “In the mind of the average people in the Arab world, they hoped the Arab Spring would bring revolution, and then we would become like the United Arab States, a huge, rich federation. They became disappointed. All their links to the Palestinian issues vanished. We don’t have any hopes. Those who have new presidents and governments in Tunisia and Egypt got nothing. Syria and Yemen failed and are in bad shape. Where are we going, what will happen? Definitely now there is more readiness to go to Syria.”¹²⁸

“In Ma’an, there is frustration with the government and foreign policy, frustration with corruption, nepotism, economic marginalization, massive projects that are never implemented, nothing to do, no youth clubs, no gardens, no cinema, no cultural life,” a researcher running focus groups centered on violent extremism recounted. “Even mosques are heavily concerned, are heavily controlled, and only open for prayer times. So, they meet elsewhere in private homes. There is a sense of injustice. Why are we paying taxes when we don’t see the end results?”¹²⁹

ISIS presents its “Caliphate” as an alternative world order harking back to the times of the Prophet and his Companions, and markets it as a type of utopian and all-inclusive society for Muslims where prosperity and justice will reign. In regard to Syria and Iraq’s oil wealth, ISIS preachers point out how the elite of society live lavishly while the poor suffer, despite the ability for the natural resources of the region to support everyone.¹³⁰ These claims resonate deeply in Jordan where many youth in particular don’t see a future for themselves unless they have “connections,” and where the elite of society appear to be engaged in corruption that further enriches them, while the poor are left to fend for themselves.

126 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

127 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

128 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

129 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

130 Anne Speckhard & Ahmet S. Yayla. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. McLean: Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

In Ma'an, the father of two sons who went to fight in Syria, one as an al-Nusra fighter and the other killed fighting for the Free Syrian Army told us, "What creates extremism is the lack of justice. Our problem in Jordan is not with the citizens, but with who the world acknowledges to control us and oppress us. Everyone rejects in their own way; it could be the wrong way. There are no freedoms and justice to make a change of powers in the Arab world." He continued, "When my sons went to Syria, it was for these reasons. They felt the oppression of Bashar and his people in Hezbollah and Iran. In Jordan, there is a very close geographic tie with Sunnis. They [the Assad forces] were decapitating bodies in front of Arab silence, and American and European acceptance, because Americans were thinking of the gas in the Middle East more than the people, and how to divide Syria."¹³¹

“Even the devil’s flag we will put up when we are angry, to provoke an answer.”

"The youth feel marginalized," he continued, "It's corruption. Some feel depressed. Social justice does not exist, is absent. I've been a year asking for a job for my son, but I know I cannot get him an appointment in Amman; a man in Irbid or Amman will get it. It's all about wasta [nepotism/connection]." He explained how in Ma'an, citizens fly Islamic and ISIS flags when they are angry with the central government. They will play a devil's game to protest and try to get the government's attention, "Even the devil's flag we will put up when we are angry, to provoke an answer."¹³²

"Does corruption and social justice play a role?" a Ma'an activist asked. "Yes, they want a good life and the good quality of life they had in the far past. Here in Ma'an, there is nothing that youth and teenagers have to do in their spare time. Their horizons are blocked. They don't have futures. They don't even know what Amman is. We took some teenagers to Amman to a mall. We need to do something for these kids. Implement good values and fill their spare time."¹³³

"There were sarcastic Jordanians who complained, 'Nothing is going to change if we talk about this,'" a researcher studying violent extremism via focus groups reported. "They cited corruption and injustice with lots of anger. Some said, 'Others will get the job.' This was particularly true in Ma'an where they said that Chinese, Americans, or Dutch will get jobs they should get. 'You will get the lowest paying job in Ma'an. Where you have to stand in the sun all day.'"¹³⁴

"They [the government] don't want to acknowledge that it's poverty," journalist Rula Amin explained about the drivers of violent extremism. "I met a sheikh who is working on it. He told me two years ago, he was part of the religious committee to fight extremism. I said that I didn't see this recommendation. He laughed and said, 'Because we asked for rule of law to fight cor-

131 Ma'an father of two sons who fought in Syria, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

132 Ma'an father of two sons who fought in Syria, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

133 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

134 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

ruption. The secular government took it out.’ All the religious scholars cited lack of rule of law and corruption as drivers of violent extremism.” This journalist continued, “We need to be able to hold a corrupt official accountable. I cannot hold him accountable, I cannot get my rights.”¹³⁵

Khwala Hussain, a researcher who studied perceptions of corruption stated that when she asked hundreds of subjects in the twelve governorates of Jordan in 2011 about who they thought were the most corrupt, the answer was, “Parliament, national government, and parliamentarians.” She continued, “They said all the heads of government.” Later in 2012, during the Arab Spring, she joined the Muslim Brotherhood meetings asking what kinds of reforms that wanted from the government. She was told, “We don’t want to just make everything according to shariah, just serious reforms. The government is okay, just needs to clean up.” The needed reforms did not come, however. In the south of Jordan, she recalled, “People in Ma’an told me they are with ISIS in 2012. They don’t believe in this country.” Reflecting on her studies she stated, “People here in Jordan, they go without thinking, [they are] emotional. They feel pity toward something; they don’t really think when they feel depressed. They start to attack the government and ministers; they [extremist groups] easily move people into violence.”¹³⁶

“No one wants to tackle corruption,” Amin stated. “They say instead, ‘Let’s reform the religious

“The poor and powerless have no access to justice.”

narrative, talk to the youth, make culture centers, and camps.’ Yet, you can’t have university students with no student council, no debate. You cannot vote for student council because it’s too much of a threat to their powers? You cannot even have a voice to protest over food in the cafeteria?”¹³⁷

“There is no actualization that any of them can aim to reach,” a Jordanian psychiatrist noted. “Young people in Zarqa probably do need sports and cultural life, but if you offer them these facilities it won’t wipe out the ideology. Because you also have it in the Gulf region where they have money and having everything, and still they want to go and fight, which means they have a great emptiness and no meaning to their lives. Even if you give them a cinema there is no self-actualization.” When asked if they are also angry over injustice, he continued, “Yes there is injustice in their country, and in the world, and there are no chances for them and their lives. Some have a lack of hope, some are bored, some go to be identified with a hero, but mainly they are upset with injustice and ideologically, violent extremism speaks to them.” He added, “The average Jordanian sees his government as corrupt.”¹³⁸

“The poor and powerless have no access to justice,” Amin stated. “There is a huge difference for them. If they don’t have a big *wasta* [connections], a clear cut case in their favor can be

135 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

136 Khawla al-Hasan Hassan, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

137 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

138 Waleed Sarhan, Psychiatrist Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

turned against them.”¹³⁹

Likewise, decades of Western interference in Middle Eastern affairs, problems still present from the drawing of national boundaries by European leaders following the first World War and current unwelcome Western interventions in their affairs has left many Jordanians jaded about the genuineness of Western powers. American support of Israel, the U.S.-led coalition invasion of Iraq, and the insurgency that was unleashed as a result are strong examples to Jordanians illustrating the claims of groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda that the West props up dictators over Islamic people and lands and that Muslims are under attack by the West. Terrorist groups of today are adept at picking up footage of civilian deaths in American drone attacks and military abuses that further illustrate and give credence to terrorist claims.

A supporter of ISIS pointed out how the U.S. led invasions after 9-11 changed relationships with Muslims the world over, “We used to read about the Taliban, how they defended and implemented the religion, I admired them. A human being wants to implement the shariah. The Taliban was closer to it than al-Qaeda, but after 9-11 al-Qaeda became prominent.”

Regarding 9-11, he stated, “Whether we agree or not, it was a turning point in the world itself, whether we approve or not, which led to a lot of people, especially Salafi and observant Muslims, to hold a grudge against America due to foreign policies, invading Afghanistan and Iraq, and what they did there. I am with the Salafis that implementing God’s shariah and to implement the Islamic State is the right thing.”¹⁴⁰

“We are seeing the slaughters in Mosul and Aleppo. What do you want to be inside of me? Do you think my smile is a cure for my inner pain?”

Some Jordanians, resonate with the words of terrorist ideologue Abu Qatada when he claims that democracy is not the answer for Muslims and points out that the West ignored democratic elections in Algeria, Palestine, and Egypt when Islamists gained power. Voicing his anger over injustice as he sees it:

Let me be honest, yes I am now, I am much more quiet in the way I talk, but inside me, honestly, I’m much more violent. And I am convinced that it’s embedded in me that this world is dirty and it’s increasing in its dirtiness, and dealing with it is only with the dirtiness forced upon us. Maybe the difference between me before and now, if I said what I said now, I would have been shouting it. Now, I learned how to talk about the most violent things with a smile and with quietness. I think, I no longer need to scream. I am still very interested to see the real work for change. We are seeing the slaughters in Mosul and Aleppo. What do you want to be inside of me? Do you think my smile is a cure for my inner pain?

139 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

140 Anonymous, Jordanian ISIS supporter, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

Some Jordanians respect and agree with ideologues like Abu Qatada when he speaks about the elite, “Ten percent of society are living in a bubble. The capitalists who are cowards, doctors, journalists...they are political cowards. These guys don’t like change. They refuse all jihadi movements because their stability will be put in question.” He also spoke cynically when discussing official sheikhs and religious leaders, “The official sheikhs are the leaders of hypocrisy. Always be careful. They are very good in their smiles, but their stomach has a hole in it.”

Abu Qatada goes on to speak of the widespread feelings of injustice and concerns over corruption among the peoples in the Middle East and his belief that all Middle Eastern countries are about to fall, one after the other, leading to violent conflagrations and the ultimate rise of a new type of Islamic governance—words that those who are fed up with injustice and perceptions of corruption likely also embrace:

When people went against the regime in Syria, they didn’t do it because they were Nusrah and ISIS carrying weapons against a regime. It is no longer a part of these groups necessarily. Now people in Egypt who carry weapons, it’s reality. They are forced to do it. Carrying weapons in opposition has nothing to do with Qaeda and elsewhere proof is it exists in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. When people carry weapons, your private thoughts end. It becomes a mass. I think the whole area will become this. It won’t be the work of al-Qaeda people or an organization.

“Our people are suffering,” ideologue Abu Qatada explained and offered that Jordanians and Muslims the world over turn to fundamental Salafism and living under shariah law as the solution to injustices. “We have a just cause, a moral way to lead the world, one of my biggest work reading our heritage. It’s a very deep intellectual heritage with a lot of morals and principles. If we want to prove ourselves, we have to fight with these principles in mind,” he stated speaking of Islamic jihad on behalf of setting up Islamic governance. “This is a historical vision. I will not tell them to let go of the weapons. What I tell them is deal with the weapons with principles,” he stated speaking of his support for the battles being waged by al-Nusra in neighboring Syria.

“[In Jordan there is a] need of Robin Hood in the world of Sherwood.”

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“[In Jordan there is a] need of Robin Hood in the world of Sherwood,” journalist Sabayleh stated explaining, “Robin Hood was an outlaw, but by ordinary people he was seen a hero. The more you have an unjust system, the more the outlaw will be seen as a hero. When Zarqawi was killed, many went to give condolences.”¹⁴¹

Speaking of the hypocrisy perceived by many Jordanians and Muslims regarding Western actions utilizing violence, Amin stated, “All of this is being nourished by the government closing all avenues to feel for hope. On top of that, people ignore what is really going on. I

have been covering this region forever. I hear them. I listen. Tackling radicalism requires a fundamental change in policies. Everyone avoids that and looks for other reasons. This has been going on for 50 years. First Iraqi war, the second Iraqi war... people use that as a reference. When they say Hamas won the elections in Palestine, but the West undermined that because they are Islamists. How can you talk about dialogue and human rights when the U.S. is doing this? Didn't the U.S. go to Iraq war without any legitimate UN decision, no legal framework? Isn't that a violation of rights, law, and order? That is ignored, but it's in their minds, and it's a reference when you go and argue with people that violence doesn't do anything or that there is international law. They ask, 'Why are you condescending? Why is it just us that has to support it? Why is U.S. supporting Israel in the UN?'"¹⁴²

Indeed, in Ma'an, a father of two sons and one son-in-law who all went as foreign fighters to Syria asked these same questions, defending their decisions to fight. This father and others cited concerns about U.S. support to Jordan as simply supporting corrupt politicians, with Amin pointing out, "They feel the USAID projects go to help the government control more. The money will go to NGOs and it doesn't trickle down."¹⁴³

Corruption and bad politics cut both ways when it comes to violent extremism. It can be a vulnerability that leads some to embrace false claims of a utopian "Caliphate." Or when joiners to ISIS, or similar groups, see that these claims are corrupt, they can also lose heart for extremism. A father who lost his son fighting in the Free Syrian Army and had another son who fought in al-Nusra explained, "My son and son-in-law came back as they realized it was a game. They fought with Jaysh al- Hur [Free Syrian Army] and al-Nusra. They had a good relationship with Jordan. When they saw that people were fighting each other, my son and son-in-law understood that it was not an honorable reason. This was about money and power, so they asked to come back."

We found the same interviewing forty-three ISIS defectors/returnees—that is, most of those interviewed risked everything to defect after learning the group was corrupt, involved in "devil's bargains," such as trading oil with Assad, and that they covered up rapes, and other atrocities.¹⁴⁴ When asked if he would like a Caliph, given he believes Islam in the past was just, this father stated, "I am looking for justice. If he's Muslim and my son, but unjust; I don't want him. He can be a Frenchman who is just. It's not the name; it's if he is just. They call themselves the Islamic State, but what do I need with that name when Baghdadi does not represent that?"

While all interviewees reference nepotism and corruption, particularly as they relate to underemployment and unemployment as major drivers in Jordan for radicalization into violent

142 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

143 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

144 Speckhard, A., & Yayla, A. S. (2016). *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*: Advances Press, LLC.

“They call themselves the Islamic State, but what do I need with that name when Baghdadi does not represent that?”

extremism, one respondent went to pains to say that despite widespread corruption, most Jordanians love their country. “We have corrupt people, but we have a great military and great intel leaders. We hope that those who are corrupt will be out, but with the fear that is coming up and perseverance, and because Jordanians want to take care of their country, they give their continuous love and support to the Army and intelligence. Look at my case, I am out of the service, but I am ready to die to protect our intelligence. There are thousands of officers on the ground working in the south of Syria, in Iraq, in Mosul and everywhere.” He added, “We have a lot of corruption in our country, but our priority now is to protect Jordan.”¹⁴⁵

Blocked Political Life and Stifled Protests

“Lack of political life is so crucial. If the grievances are too complex to tackle, at least give them a way to protest,” Amin stated, pointing out that on the world scale of personal freedoms, Jordan comes at 119 out of 149 countries.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Freedom House rated Jordan as “Not Free” giving it a 5.5 freedom rating, and a 6 on political rights with 7 being the worst.¹⁴⁷ The CATO Institute also rated Jordan poorly on their Human Freedom Index at 91 out of 159.¹⁴⁸

“If you cannot protest, show resentment or hold anyone accountable, then you are so helpless,” Amin stated. “And it feeds into two frustrations; no hope, you have no avenues to push for change, the feeling of helplessness, loss of dignity, takes away their sense of belonging. You want to assert yourself. The way you look at yourself in this state is very demeaning. If someone offers you a channel, you can be a doer, you can do something about all of these things, you are going to jump on it. They manipulate people’s hunger for change. It’s not a difficult job, the other thing [addressing political grievances] that is very tricky thing. ISIS and Nusrah don’t have to do a lot to convince.”¹⁴⁹

“If you ask a 23-year-old living here,” Amin continued, ““Is there any political party that will push for you? Are there any demonstrations you can join? Can you even write on Facebook? You’ll be put in jail. There is so much money to target the youth, putting them as political participants, but then you get a student lobbying to have a sit-in about the food in the cafeteria dismissed from university for four semesters. There is no lively political life. What is the only channel available for them to push for change? Daesh and Nusra give them a voice.”¹⁵⁰

“Injustice is an incredibly strong driver for people to do extreme things,” Amin explained. “When someone gets sick, it’s fate, out of your hand, but when it’s human, it’s infuriating. Your urge is to push back so hard. You become so angry. I am sure injustice happens every single day and they have no way to push back or protest. That’s a problem. You maybe cannot fix all the

145 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

146 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

147 See Freedom House, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/jordan>

148 See CATO Institute, available at https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/hfi_2016_country.pdf

149 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

150 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

problems in society. If you don't leave people some room that they believe they have a way to bring change. When you are in a desperate situation and no way to do anything about it, it's a deadly situation. They cornered people; left them no avenues."¹⁵¹

Torture

Abu Qatada, as well as a former jihadi who now supports ISIS both mentioned the Jordanian practice of torture as a motivator for acts of terrorism, citing in particular, "Ali Mohammed Borjak, he used to torture."¹⁵² "Terrorists with material plans they torture badly," a respondent with ties to militant jihadis told us about Jordanian intelligence.¹⁵³ Referring to Borjak, Abu Qatada stated with an ironic smile, "The guy who tortured Zarqawi died of swine flu a year ago." He continued, "For Zarqawi, it was a priority to send 10 rockets to Jordan rather than 100 to Iraq. The reason was the insult he got in Jordanian prison. Our people are suffering."

"They manipulate people's hunger for change."

Intelligence officers say the same—that Zarqawi and others wanted to revenge for how they were treated by intel and in prison. "Two days ago, a 25-year-old guy from Ma'an died," a retired intel officer recounted. "He was in charge of explosives. He was targeting our own army, not the Syrian army. All of them want to revenge against GID. We are tough on interrogation but not on torture. We did not participate in rendition. I am absolutely sure we did not waterboard. We did not do rendition."¹⁵⁴

Unemployment and Poor Economic Conditions

Unemployment and under employment are also vulnerabilities that were frequently cited by most experts. "The striking push factor that male and female youth talked about was no hope, employment or social status, caught in the status quo," a researcher in Jordan studying violent extremism via focus groups stated. "No hope for change, that's why Daesh and any other armed group offers an appealing alternative. At least you die as a martyr."¹⁵⁵

"We have so many people here [in Jordan] who believe in ISIS, even educated people, because they feel injustice," a researcher who worked in the Jordanian Ministry of Labor stated. "For example, if you got a Ph.D., Master's, or Bachelor's you still don't find a chance to work. What about the man whose family is depending on him? The whole situation of Jordan is pressed. We feel stressed. The government says unemployment is at 16%, but I'm sure the real statistics are 40%."¹⁵⁶

"Unemployment and poverty make people angry, they see people out of the [Ma'an] governorate working, and they don't get jobs," the father from Ma'an whose two sons went

151 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

152 Anonymous, Jordanian ISIS supporter, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

153 Marwan Shehadeh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

154 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 2, 2016).

155 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

156 Khawla al-Hasan Hassan, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

to Syria as fighters stated. Referring to the preference given to people with connections, he continued, “It’s corruption. When they see the family tree and dynasties, an Ambassador’s son becomes an Ambassador and a Minister’s son becomes a Minister. Why doesn’t my son, my brother, my father have all these equal opportunities? This is administrative corruption.”¹⁵⁷

“One of the issues that makes Jordanians most angry is the lack of equal opportunities,” Rula Amin explained, adding, “There is no trust in the government whatsoever.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, high unemployment is a challenge, but becomes a much more bitter one when the standards by which youth are hired is unfair. “Corruption is one of the major points; if you are poor and cannot find a job because there are no resources, you are upset, but if you feel you are not getting a chance in life, but someone else is getting it by cousin or father’s power that it is nepotism. Your son has A’s in medical school, but can’t get in, and some one else’s C’s son gets the spot and your son has to go study business, how angry would you be?” Amin asked.¹⁵⁹

“Daesh and Nusra give them a voice.”

Table Three: Youth Unemployment (as % of total labor force, ages 15-24) for Countries Supplying the Highest per Capital Numbers of Foreign Fighters

Country	Per Capita Foreign Fighters	2014 Youth Unemployment Rates
Jordan	315	28.8
Saudi Arabia	107	29.5
Bosnia	92	57.5
Kosovo	83	50.8
Turkmenistan	72	20.2
Albania	46	25.1
Greece		53.9
Bulgaria		25.9

Source: Radio Free Europe/The World Bank¹⁶⁰

“I don’t have a job or anything to do, so I should go join the jihad,” a participant of a focus group examining radicalization stated. Unemployment, underemployment and marginalization are the main concerns reported in focus groups held in highly radicalized areas according to one researcher, “Work that gives you meaning. So many people work in areas they aren’t trained in, underemployed, random jobs. You are employed, but not enough means that you need to live.

157 Ma’an father of two sons who fought in Syria, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

158 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

159 Ibid.

160 The World Bank, “Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate),” available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS>

Dignity is part of the equation. Providing work opportunities was a recommendation.”¹⁶¹

“Youth unemployment in Jordan was reported by the World Bank at 28.8% for 2014. This is close to half of what was reported for Kosovo (55.3%) and Bosnia (57.5), respectively, yet Jordan supplied three times as many foreign fighters, on a per capita basis, as these two countries. Thus, while high youth unemployment is without question a vulnerability in Jordan, it is not the only issue. Proximity to Syria and the groups operating there, the spread of militant jihadi ideologies in Jordan, strong identification with Sunnis in nearby sectarian conflicts, and anger over sectarian politics seen in activities during the Iraq war, and now Syria, as well as concerns about internal politics—corruption, nepotism, and unfairness—may play as important a role in Jordan as unemployment.

In light of the aforementioned, a look at unemployment statistics across countries (see Table 3) makes clear that unemployment alone is not a sufficient motivator to join violent groups; exposure to terrorist groups and their ideologies alongside social support for taking part in extremism clearly plays a role in who becomes a foreign fighter or terrorist. Strong resonance in Jordan with Islamic terrorist groups’ demands that one must fulfill their duties to the Muslim ummah and fight jihad, clearly exists much stronger in Jordan than in Greece, for instance, where the population are primarily Christian, although one can see a similar alarming youth unemployment rate in the chart above. Among unemployed or underemployed Greek youth, we see that instead of responding to Internet-based call of groups like ISIS and al-Nusra as a response to their poor economic conditions, those drawn into extremism instead tend to respond to anarchists groups that have a history of operating there. Thus, it is important to understand that while high youth unemployment is an important vulnerability leading to radicalization and movement into terror groups in Jordan (as elsewhere affected by terrorism), it still requires a group, an ideology, and social support to exploit this vulnerability for violence and terrorism.¹⁶²

Fares Braizat concurred with this assessment stating, “I really insist on the ideological and religious cover [meaning exposure to this ideology]. Hundreds of thousands are living in poverty and none of them make it an issue.”¹⁶³

“She thought she would be traveling to ISIS Disneyland if she joined.”

Material Benefits of Joining

ISIS foreign fighters are promised salaries, free housing, food and propane allowances, the possibility of cars, arranged marriages, and sex slaves. The group sends out pictures of large homes with swimming pools as possibilities—so seductive that a thirteen-year-old from U.K. being groomed for travel to ISIS reported she thought she would be traveling to ISIS Disneyland if she joined.¹⁶⁴ Foreign fighters

161 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

162 Anne Speckhard, “The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism,” *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, February 25, 2016, available at <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/>

163 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 2, 2016). Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

164 Yasmin Green personal communication June 2016.

earn \$200 per month and above, and some reported supplementary income in the thousands of dollars derived from looting houses in territory that ISIS overtook or large bonuses for taking part in ISIS raids.¹⁶⁵

“Please leave him there, he’s bringing me \$3000 a month,” a wife of a foreign fighter from Salt stated to an ex-minister.¹⁶⁶ One respondent told us of an NGO in Ma’an that provides psychosocial support to families of those who went as foreign fighters or are killed. “They portray it as financial assistance to these families, but the NGO is confirmed as giving a monthly income to those who died or are currently fighting. It’s unclear where the money comes from.”¹⁶⁷

“At least you die as a martyr.”

It is not *only* about money, however, the same researcher stated. “Even though money is the main driving factor, he still has to be ideologically convinced,” she added. Researcher Hasan Abu Hanya concurred, “Later on, when ISIS took charge of some areas in Syria and they started having a lot of money from fuel, some joined for economic motivations. The economic situation is bad in Jordan, and they went for financial temptations. Because we have unemployment and poverty in Jordan, they looked at ISIS as a chance and opportunity. So people started joining for this as well. Sometimes, it’s not just one motivation. Most of the times there will be multiple motivations.”¹⁶⁸

Marriage

Unmarried men and women with poor prospects of marriage also respond to the allure and powerful propaganda of ISIS. Unemployed men in Jordan find it hard to obtain wives, but are promised them inside ISIS, as are women promised husbands, and free housing and the ability to practice a traditional lifestyle.

“Young people have sex, they just don’t talk about it,” a Jordanian researcher explained, adding that “contraceptives are available, although only through connections, and require an extra effort to hide that one is buying them, and abortion is only illegally obtained.” That said, marriage is still something that young Jordanians aspire to. Men hinted about sexual desires and marriage in focus groups about radicalization, with one stating, “If I want to marry, I need at least 10,000 JD. Where will I get that job? I have no money.” The same researcher explained, “No one will give their daughter to someone unemployed.”¹⁶⁹ “He can’t get married because he doesn’t have a job. If he goes to Daesh, at least he can be married and have access to lots of

165 Speckhard unpublished interview with a Kosovar ISIS Defector, June 2016; Anne Speckhard & Ahmet S. Yayla. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*.

166 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (October 14, 2016) speaking of what she was told but did not witness.

167 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

168 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

169 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

women. Also, being married has higher social status.”¹⁷⁰

“Before, in our culture, it wasn’t allowed to sleep with a woman until you were married, so they would marry off the children when they were in their early 20s. Now they cannot,” Amin explained. “They need housing, so the young men cannot marry until 24 to 26. The girls, they marry them off younger to older men, so the male’s marrying age is getting older. You cannot marry. You cannot have a woman. If you sleep with a woman, you suffer guilt. You are riddled with guilt and fears of blackmail. There are men who have never had sex. It’s a real issue; super frustrating, real, and physical. Then ISIS comes and says there are all these captives. It’s allowed. It’s legitimate.”¹⁷¹

Desire for Personal Significance

Underemployment and unemployment, especially if it prevents marriage, also creates a vacuum of personal significance and life purpose. ISIS leadership, by contrast, is filled with vocal Jordanian and other Muslim leaders calling their peers to jihad in Syria and Iraq. As role models, they promise Jordanian men the possibility of significant leadership roles in what appeared for some time to many vulnerable persons as a realistic emerging “Caliphate.”

“Those people who feel insignificant suddenly have control over power, weapons, money, women, etc.” Fares Braizat stated. “They go from zero to hero; the person who is nothing can suddenly appear on social media, in *Dabiq*, and in videos threatening the King of Jordan, the United States, etc.”¹⁷²

“Marginalization in their own family” and being told “You are useless, why don’t you get a job?” is a vulnerability to violent extremism as another researcher reported. “When they join violent extremist groups they obtain heroism status, and are told ‘You will become a leader, have weapons, you will have a house.’ All of these to uplift a person’s status in society.”¹⁷³

“I saw with my own eyes that if you go with ISIS, you will be very rich,” Huthaifa Azzam a Jordanian who fought with the Free Syrian Army recounted. “This is how they are calling the people who are nothing in his country. Abu Jihad Shishani had 16 vehicles, including a Mercedes 5000 BMW. When he was governor of Idlib, I met him twice. When he came from Chechnya, he was a nobody; now sixteen vehicles, four Jeep Cherokee, four Toyotas...all of this before 2014. They have houses in Syria. The best houses and the best cars. And the best weapons were in the hands of ISIS.”¹⁷⁴

Researcher Hasan Abu Hanya explained that when the Syrian conflict kicked off, the ideologies

170 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

171 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

172 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 2, 2016).

173 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

174 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 7, 2016).

“I saw with my own eyes that if you go with ISIS, you will be very rich.”

and militants to implement them were already in place in Jordan; ready to go fight in defense of the Sunnis being assaulted by the Syrian regime. As a result, many Jordanians became leaders in the emerging al-Nusra terrorist group in Syria, “The al-Nusra leaders of military, theologians, and emirs of the area were Jordanians: Abu Julaybeeb, Eyat Tulbasi was his real name, he was in charge; Belal Khrisat from Salt; military guy Abu Samir al Jordani was in charge; Mustafa abu Latif; theologian, Dr. Sami Oraidi; and Abu Mahmud al Shami.”¹⁷⁵

“There is a complex of inferiority and victims of patriarchy; the father who controls by power, Sabayleh explained, commenting that the patriarchal system crushes any positive sense of self and contributes to feelings of inferiority among Jordanians. “Our failure in building a national identity and our patriarchal system is so crushing that they repeat it to inferiors. You grow up to try to crush everyone to whom you feel inferior. It goes like dominoes. But religion gives them a social rank; sit in front and be in front.”

Dearth of Cultural Opportunities

Many experts referenced the dearth of cultural opportunities for youth, particularly in the hotspots of Ma’an and Zarqa. “Sport, fine arts, cultural expression; we underestimate the elements of all of these in shaping performance,” Sabayleh stated. “There is a huge societal

“They go from zero to hero; the person who is nothing can suddenly appear on social media, in Dabiq, and in videos threatening the King of Jordan, the United States, etc.”

vacuum filled by one model/movement: Islamism. To play football, they have to go to the mosque.”¹⁷⁶

Fares Braizat pointed out that in the Zarqa district, there are only the mosques, and half of them are not staffed by an imam, leaving the opportunity for anyone to lead prayers and preach extremist ideologies.¹⁷⁷ Sabayleh agreed, “I went to school in Zarqa. [At that time] there were big schools with playgrounds and a sports school movement. I played sports. During the 60s, we didn’t have religious discipline. There were cultural performances, cultural movement, poetry clubs, writing clubs, cinemas, youth clubs, and so forth, in every Jordanian city.. Today there is nothing.”¹⁷⁸

Educational System

As stated earlier, the Muslim Brotherhood was given power over the Ministry of Education and as a result some radicalizing elements were introduced into the school systems over the last decades. Recently, however, the Jordanian government took steps to change the curriculum to

175 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

176 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

177 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 2, 2016). See also Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

178 Amer Sabayleh, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 5, 2016).

remove anything supporting violent extremism, but these moves have not been well accepted. In Ma'an, for instance, deep anger was expressed over attempts to remove Islam from some of the curriculum.¹⁷⁹

Yet, others stated that these were “very shallow changes”. For instance, “traditional dress was removed in pictures, so any woman who had appeared in a scarf after didn’t have one, Quranic verses in science books were removed. There does seem to be a very secular curriculum committee change. The Muslim Brotherhood thinks it’s foreign powers. It was seen as eroding Islamic history and values.” This respondent felt that “in terms of systematic changes in lessons, instead of Islamic history, the educational system should be teaching values on dealing with people in Islam. Islamic history is all about battles. In Islam, this is what should happen, but we don’t live in an Islamic state. We live in a secular society.”¹⁸⁰

Discussing the need for curriculum reform, a Ma'an activist stated, “The Ministry of Education changes; they tried to take Islam out of the curriculum, and it inflames people. The curriculum needs to be improved, but not in this way. There should be logic and critical thinking.”¹⁸¹

Another respondent said, “We also have to work on the ‘ghost’ curriculum, that is, what’s in the teachers’ heads. We need to examine the value system in their heads and also change that.”¹⁸² “A high percentage of teachers tend to belong to the Muslim Brotherhood, and some teachers would be radical,” another researcher added.¹⁸³

A Ma'an activist concurred, “Some of the teachers are extremists here. In 9th grade, we were members of scouts. I was the leader. The teacher who supervised us was the religion teacher, so we had nothing from scouts, no camping and fires. Instead, all of it was religious, and some of it was very wrong. We watched the video *Russian Hell*. It was about Chechnya, all this killing. We watched it more than 10 times in these camps. What do you expect from a kid being exposed to this if he doesn’t have a good environment in his home, and is uneducated? He will go to Syria because he’s raised on this.” He also recounted some of his other experiences, “In this same school, we had a contest. I got rebuked for participating in a mixed male and female contest. These teachers graduate from universities and spread religious extremism. We need to watch out for the youth and the children. One of the religious teachers in our schools is a leading Salafi. He says my center corrupts the community, and that we are a Westernizing and bad influence.”¹⁸⁴

“Fifteen percent of respondents of the NAMAs youth survey turned to the Internet for questions on religious matters.”

179 Ma'an street interviews, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

180 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

181 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

182 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 2, 2016).

183 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

184 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

Ignorance, Lack of Education, and Illiteracy as Vulnerabilities

When young Jordanians are in need of information to make good choices about violent extremism, they find few sources to turn to. As one researcher explained, “Imams and teachers are not allowed to talk about it [terrorism and violent extremism]. If they talk for or against it, they are questioned by intel. They feel powerless. People go to them to ask what is happening but they cannot answer well, so the youth feel they don’t have anyone to talk to. They feel the only answers they can get are online. There are important questions. Some people want a religious answer, and need it from a religious point of view.” Respondents also told her that even “parents do not discuss political issues and radicalization at home for fear of the Mukhabarat [intel]. They don’t talk politics at home.”¹⁸⁵

This was confirmed in Zarqa while focus testing videos of ISIS defectors denouncing the group of the International Center for Violent Extremism (ICSVE). Youth there told us that they do not know how to answer extremists when they spout out hadiths and Quranic verses in support of violence. But when they turn to their parents and teachers for answers, they find them either unable or preferring not to answer from fear that could cause them to be suspected by the Jordanian intelligence as supporting violent extremism.¹⁸⁶ This leaves youth vulnerable, and they reported turning to the Internet for answers, although these same youth said they were well aware that terrorist recruiters were busy stalking them.

“We work for the government. There is no credibility.”

When asked in a NAMAs youth survey about who they consult on religious matters, 44% of the respondents said they turned to their local mosques and 33% to the Jordanian Iftaa’ (Fatwa) Department. Given that half of the mosques in Jordan lack imams or other key personnel, anyone can fill in as a “leader” and misguide them, creating a foothold for extremist recruitment. This was particularly true in Zarqa where 47% of the mosques lacked an imam and 20% lacked imams or servants whatsoever, allowing anyone to run the mosque, lead prayers, and teach youth.¹⁸⁷

Fifteen percent of respondents of the NAMAs youth survey turned to the Internet for questions on religious matters, which is a worrying pattern given that ISIS and other like minded groups are ready to pounce on questioning young minds to seduce them into violent extremism. Even more worrisome is the fact that over fifty percent of the youth respondents said they followed religious organizations and movements via their websites, and this figure rose to 65% for those who viewed Jordan as moving in the wrong direction.¹⁸⁸ Facebook is the most popular social media platform for youth in Jordan, with 81% of the youth respondents stating they have an

185 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

186 Zarqa Youth Focus Group Respondents, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard & Fares Braizat, Zarqa, Jordan (November 12, 2016).

187 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

188 Ibid..

account on Facebook, with 39% on Instagram, 30% on YouTube, and 21.3 % on Twitter. All of these platforms have had ISIS recruiters active on them.

Many youth are not well informed to be able to argue with a persuasive terrorist recruiter.

“There is a misunderstanding of religious concepts without a proper discussion of what is jihad and what is not jihad,” one researcher stated. “What is seen as radicalization relates to the religious education curriculum and imams in the mosques. In Ma’an, in the south, in the most important region they say this is jihad, not extremism. Syria is jihad and legitimate in their community, yet they see radicalization as crime and say, ‘I don’t believe it’s right to blow up something... bottle shop or a night club’... it’s very different. Attacking their own country they will never voice it.”¹⁸⁹ Those who long for the Caliphate and to live under shariah law also often harbor very primitive views on these subjects and “don’t know shariah well and all the conditions,” for instance, the difference between “someone who lives by stealing versus someone who stole out of need. They talk about stoning to death, actually implementing it...”¹⁹⁰

In our Zarqa focus group youth stated that they didn’t know who to turn to for accurate information and that they found recruiters who could quote hadiths and scriptures intimidating. Many admitted going to the Internet for answers.¹⁹¹

An activist in Ma’an also stated that many are confused about what is accurate information when it comes to fighting ISIS. “We don’t believe all the media that people put out on Daesh, even Muath [the pilot that was burned alive by ISIS] may have been staged. No one believes the press on ISIS, that they behead.” Clearly accurate and trustworthy sources are needed to delegitimize the group.¹⁹²

Yet, Jordanian imams told a journalist that they are not certain they are the best voices to speak out against extremism, “They say, ‘We go and do 200 lectures,’ yet they are working for the government, and always by the end of the conversation they look at me and say, ‘Listen, we work for the government. There is no credibility.’” She went on to state, “The other thing that I find very concerning and that no one tackles is that it has to do with how they fight terrorism. They want the preachers to go and talk to people. What you are doing basically is that you are allowing the religious people to serve as a reference point to what’s right and what’s wrong in the society. Why would you want to do that? Why not talk about that we are a rule of law state? Instead of emphasizing civil values, you are giving the religious values a higher priority. Now

“Every school has to study Amman message and on values and tolerance, but what is the missing link that these messages don’t trickle down, why?”

189 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

190 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

191 Zarqa Youth Focus Group Respondents, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard & Fares Braizat, Zarqa, Jordan (November 12, 2016).

192 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

you control them, but how much can you control them?¹⁹³

“Every school has to study the Amman message on values and tolerance, but what is the missing link that these messages don’t trickle down, why?” Amin asked. “They all want to teach tolerance and pluralism, teach about good citizenship. Let’s teach about dialogue. If he knows, he cannot express his opinion. They all have tolerance, forgiveness, pluralism, good citizenship, but they don’t ever deconstruct them to make them practical values that run peoples lives. They cannot because they have to confront corruption.”¹⁹⁴ “There is no religious teaching on human morals, tolerance, forgiveness, and acceptance,” a researcher added “There is no religious teaching on morals, just what the Prophet says. It’s a disconnect between religious education and values and morals.”¹⁹⁵

When it comes to honor killings, education was shown to have a significant bearing, as evidenced in the 2013 Cambridge study of Jordanian youth. Six in ten teenagers from the lowest level of educational background supported honor killing, as opposed to about one in five where at least one family member had a university degree.¹⁹⁶

Schools in Jordan struggle simply to teach regular subject, much less tackle extremism, Amin pointed out. “The schedules are 8:30 a.m. for school and go home by noon... and teachers make only 375-500 JD per month. Four thousand public schools had their budgets slashed.”¹⁹⁷ Kadri also commented that, “Some schools don’t even have windows, and it’s cold in winter. Kids are freezing. I know of one story where they brought in computers to a school that doesn’t have electricity. Kids are in the same room in combined grades. Yet there is lavish government spending.”¹⁹⁸

“If you say Allah says this, and if you have a beard and short pants, they will shut their minds and accept everything said.”

Respect for Islam

Many in Jordan do not have a good understanding of what Islamic scriptures actually say about militant jihad and “martyrdom,” yet they hold a deep respect for Islam, which also creates a vulnerability to persuasive and charismatic recruiters who can quote scriptures knowledgably. An activist in Ma’an stated, “If you say Allah says this, and if you have a beard and short pants, they will shut their minds and accept everything said.” He continued, “Once a guy from Syria came to tell us about the religion, and he was not talking anything right but using all the religious words. One of my relatives said, ‘Look how much knowledge he has.’ He didn’t say anything in these three minutes. He is saying stupid things, but everyone was brought in by him.

193 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

194 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

195 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

196 Laura Smith-Spark, “Third of Teens in Amman, Jordan, Condone Honor Killings, Study Says.”

197 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

198 Ranya Kadri, Jordanian Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 9, 2016).

They don't think critically when it comes to religion."¹⁹⁹

Repressive or Dysfunctional Family Dynamics

Terrorist groups that offer salaries, housing, and the possibility to escape overly strict and conservative or dysfunctional families and their expectations motivated some to break loose by traveling to Syria and Iraq. A researcher working with al-Anwar in Ma'an reported on their research on 60 cases of foreign fighters. "When they analyzed reports on 58 of the men who left, they found that they had very bad relations with their fathers, but had excellent relations with their mothers. They found the fathers were not usually at home, were divorced, didn't communicate much when at home, or there were oppressive relations between the two."²⁰⁰

In focus groups exploring violent extremism, respondents also talked about the effect on motivations for joining terrorists group when fathers are verbally abusive or missing.²⁰¹

Likewise, "marginalization within the family is a big driver of radicalization mainly for young men. This was repeated in all focus groups. It relates to unemployment. He is called by his father, 'You are a loser, worthless, useless.' A driver for radicalization is how young men perceive their role in the family and society."²⁰² Fares Braizat also commented that if the person's role in the family was insignificant, it created a vulnerability for radicalization.²⁰³

"Recruitment patterns [in Jordan] tend to be face-to-face and personal networks, much more than Internet recruiting."

Desire for Freedom from Repressive Government Policies and Islamophobia

For those practicing Salafi Islam and associated with mosques and towns where there are many who traveled to Syria, government surveillance can play a role in creating vulnerabilities. The desire to practice Islam and live by shariah practices without feeling oppressive government surveillance and interference can become a motivating factor for some. Security experts and journalists commented that Zarqawi targeted Jordan due to his hatred of the security system and what he looked at as abuses by the GID. A retired military intelligence officer stated, "Zarqawi acted out of personal revenge against the GID."

Also worrying is the fact that when asked in survey research about what they would do upon learning an acquaintance is leaning towards joining an extremist/terrorist organization, only one third from those living in Zarqa or Irbid districts answered that they would offer advice, inform parents, or report to the authorities.²⁰⁴ Clearly, there is a lack of trust in authorities.

199 Mohmmammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

200 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

201 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

202 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

203 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November, 2, 2016).

204 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci "Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan." Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

Belonging

“Recruitment patterns [in Jordan] tend to be face-to-face and personal networks, much more than Internet recruiting,” according to Fares Braizat although security officials disputed this view.²⁰⁵ In Zarqa, there is a scarcity of cultural opportunities, and mosques often function as the only places outside of family to “belong.” In the NAMA survey, youth in Zarqa said they would turn to local mosques to answer their tough questions about Islam, yet half of the mosques in Zarqa have no official leadership, allowing anyone with an extremist bent claiming to be a scholar to take over leading prayers and preaching to youth who gather there.²⁰⁶ This is a worrying situation for youth who have a developmental imperative to separate to a degree from their families and develop their own identity; guidance and belonging to other institutions is much needed for that. When extremists can become leaders to youth, and they can decide if, and by what criteria, who belongs or not, such people suddenly have a lot of power over the hearts and minds of those youth.

Familial Ties

Marriage between violent extremists is one way of spreading the movement, and also strongly tying members to it. “Being related to each other and these cells of intermarriage from each other becoming in-laws, it creates a new community of jihadis by marriage, in Jordan and all over the world. They also marry across nationalities and create strong networks,” Hasan Abu Hanya stated.²⁰⁷ Indeed, when jihadis intermarry, it means that you have to leave your marriage and your family to leave the movement and the ties can offer shelter and protection throughout the spouse’s family network. Terrorists from Chechnya to Indonesia and now in Syria have all taken advantage of this.

“Zarqawi acted out of personal revenge against the GID.”

“This is the danger in Raqqa and in Mosul,” Abu Hanya stated. “Now, through marriage, there are new ties between the children and the women. The men created a new network by marriages. What I predict with the increase of jihadi killings in this area is that there will be many more widows and girls whose brothers and fathers have been killed. These women will become effective jihadis. Already Baghdadi who issued decisions not to use women is now using them. I predict the women’s role will increase; women will start accepting this role, for many reasons, one of them will be revenge, and that might turn into a dangerous phenomena in the future.”²⁰⁸ Indeed, when terrorist groups are cornered, they often begin to use women who can cross security checkpoints more easily and who may be activated out of despair, grief and revenge for spouses who were killed.²⁰⁹

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid.

207 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

208 Ibid.

209 Speckhard, A. (Dec/January 2016). Brides of ISIS: The Internet seduction of Western females into ISIS. *Homeland Security Today*, 13(1). Retrieved from <http://edition.pagesuite-professional.co.uk//launch.aspx?eid=0d492b24-092f->

Gender

There was no official information on females becoming foreign fighters, although one researcher said the numbers are higher than most state. Females often follow their jihadi husbands into conflict zones, although some also travel to conflict zones on their own expecting to marry there. Little information on Jordanian women could be found.

Confirming research the author has done in other venues, Hasan Abu Hanya stated, “The woman’s motivation is the same as those of men.”²¹⁰ A researcher running focus groups stated, “Women I found were more radical in their views; religious duty in jihad, her duty to join her husband if he wants her to. They debated whether or not she has a duty to jihad, most talked about jihad versus qital (fighting).” She added that women were “more convinced of the idea that jihad is for men, not for them. They wouldn’t go to join their husbands, because if their husbands die, they will be forced to remarry.”²¹¹ This is an interesting insight showing that groups like ISIS can be delegitimized, in this case for Jordanian women, as they realize what the realities of life under ISIS will actually be for them.

“The men created a new network by marriages.”

Refugees

There are deep vulnerabilities to radicalization among the Iraqis, and Syrians refugees having fled conflicts to reside temporarily or long-term in Jordan, as well as the possibility of extremists coming along with the more recent arrivals. Some of these vulnerabilities include, but are not limited to: not being granted the full rights of citizenship; living in some cases illegally; underemployment and unemployment; facing resentments from their host citizens; disruptions occurring in tribal, familial, social, political, and economic hierarchies caused by the chaos of war; carrying psychological traumas from the conflict zone; and being lost in their lives.

A retired military intel officer expressed his concerns about Syrian refugees not finding their place in Jordanian society and perhaps being vulnerable to terrorist recruitment, “The Iraqis who came here as refugees and joined our system became doctors, but the Syrians who came were poor and victims who came later.”²¹²

“They wouldn’t go to join their husbands, because if their husbands die, they will be forced to remarry.”

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210 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

211 Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 6, 2016).

212 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

Trajectories into Terrorism - Summary

Socio-economic and psychological profiles of Jordanian foreign fighters are diverse. Although poverty and unemployment play a major role, anger at poor governance and unequal opportunities due to corruption and nepotism, alongside deep-seated anger and concern for, and perceived religious obligations to defend, the Sunni community, women, and children against what they believed to be an oppressive Alawite (Shia) regime were cited as most common justifications for joining the war in Iraq and Syria. Equally important, jihad in Syria and Iraq offered an opportunity to pursue a clear path towards what they saw as social rehabilitation and legitimacy for some, including finding meaning, purpose, significance, and dignity in life, as echoed by many interviewed in the city of Ma'an in Jordan.

“There are deep vulnerabilities to radicalization among the Palestinians, Iraqis, and Syrians refugees having fled conflicts to reside temporarily or long-term in Jordan.”

The trajectories into violent extremism and terrorism in Jordan share commonalities with other theaters, but as research has shown in multiple other venues, the individual motivations and vulnerabilities for terrorism are always contextual and local. That said, the lethal cocktail of terrorism nearly always involves exposure to a terrorist group, its ideology, and some level of social support for endorsing both. Vulnerabilities and motivating factors alone are not sufficient to make a violent extremist but these must be understood to address why individuals resonate to terrorist calls into violent extremism.²¹³ Likewise, the individual vulnerabilities and motivations that interact with terrorist groups, their virulent ideologies, and the social support in one's actual or virtual communities are multifaceted, and it is rarely one factor alone that moves a person into violent extremism. Instead there are patterns of factors that can be identified in specific cultural and political contexts that also require the vulnerable person to be exposed to a terrorist group and its ideology and to receive some social support to move into violent extremism. A vulnerability on its own is never enough for making a terrorist. Also, some vulnerabilities and motivating factors are much more salient in some contexts than in others. As already noted, there are four extremism hotbeds in Jordan, each with its own flavor.

When asked about his views on what radicalized Jordanians into going to Syria and the tipping points from incubating a terrorist mindset into action on behalf of violent extremism, Fares Braizat of NAMAs stated:

Those who are radicalized who can be angry at the system, protesting corruption, injustice, unequal development, bad school systems, lack of schools, hospitals, roads, politics, and engage in needs-based protest, or express dissatisfaction with the political system and its delivery. They are one strand of people who radicalize. Then you have religious radicals who like black and white rules. You are either with or against me, depending on their

213 Anne Speckhard, “The Lethal Cocktail of Terrorism,” *The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism*, February 25, 2016, available at <http://www.icsve.org/brief-reports/the-lethal-cocktail-of-terrorism/>

interpretation of religion. Then there are the sociological reasons: poverty, unemployment, etc. There are millions in this category, but most don't become radicals and don't make that transition. There are also the "insignificants" in family and societies who try to find self-significance to become relevant in their social environment, to stand up for something like Islamic State.²¹⁴

When asked what she saw as the drivers of radicalization as a result of her interviews in the four hotbeds of radicalization in Jordan, researcher, Neven Bondokji gave the following four reasons: status and marginalization; corruption and nepotism; unemployment, and religious education.²¹⁵ Most experts, including actual terrorist ideologues and jihadi fighters, echoed these same statements.

“In Jordan, there is a long history of exposure to virulent ideologies and acceptance for violent resistance, even terrorism.”

In Jordan, there is a long history of exposure to virulent ideologies and acceptance for violent resistance, even terrorism. Likewise, the proximity to the conflicts in Iraq previously, and now in Syria, with a long history of Jordanian jihadists active in multiple “jihads” who quickly took up leadership in al-Nusra and ISIS certainly impacts Jordanians. Unemployment, the perceived inability to effectively invoke political change, and concerns of corruption and nepotism also provide minds receptive to the idea of an alternative utopian “Caliphate” among those who already follow Islam. Vulnerable individuals trying to find dignity and purpose in their lives or to redeem themselves may fall prey to calls into violent extremism. Indeed, the strong propaganda and recruitment strategies of both ISIS and al-Nusra creates a powerful vortex to youth who find it hard to get answers about Islamic endorsement or condemnation for militant jihad anywhere other than mosques that may be overtaken by extremist preachers, or on the Internet where recruiters lurk there waiting for them. Jordan already has a worrying number of fighters who have joined the conflict and their return, or their contacts with those back home may also be dangerous to the country. Jordanians operating outside the country have managed to inspire, mount, and attempt serious attacks inside Jordan. While still balancing on the side of stability, Jordan needs to make swift but also careful and effective moves to stem the tide of militant jihadism arising within the country.

Prevention & Intervention Strategies

When questioned about prevention strategies in Jordan, all respondents pointed out the efforts of Jordanian intel to route out violent extremists while acknowledging that prevention strategies are still in their nascent state. “There is no [prevention] program in Jordan, there are many programs in the Arab world, but they are not real programs, like in Aarhus [Denmark] or *Exit* in Sweden or *Families for Life* in Germany. There is no serious program. The ones we have are

²¹⁴ Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November, 2, 2016). See also: Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

²¹⁵ Neven Bondokji, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 13, 2016).

just to take money. They say we have a military and security program. There is nothing in the Arab world regarding assimilation; it's all security and military programs.”²¹⁶

Community Policing

Throughout the research, respondents made clear that many Jordanians, particularly those in areas most susceptible to radicalization, did not trust intel and policing authorities to act in their best interest. For instance, in a survey conducted with youth to find out what would one do upon learning an acquaintance is leaning towards joining an extremist/terrorist organization, Fares Braizat found that only one-third of those living in Zarqa or Irbid districts would offer advice, inform parents or report to the authorities.²¹⁷ Given that terrorist groups are often able to radicalize individuals in the space of weeks or months to carry out simple, but lethal, homegrown attacks, police and intelligence must win trust in communities in order to receive important information to detect and thwart terrorist recruitment and plots.

Help Lines and Rapid Intervention Teams

Help lines staffed with caring and knowledgeable personnel can be an effective way for concerned family members to reach out for help in dealing with loved ones who are radicalizing, and even for radicals themselves, to call for help. In Kyrgyzstan, a female in prison admitted if she had seen an advertisement for a helpline she might have dialed the number. Specifically, she stated her point of intervention was when she saw her husband's stash of weapons amassed to target the police and realized she was in over her head.²¹⁸ The same is true in Jordan.

A truly effective helpline needs to be backed up by teams of trained psychologists, imams, social workers, and human rights lawyers and experts who can intervene to help address the factors propelling an individual into violent extremism. To be most effective, these teams should be able to rapidly mobilize and go to the individual rather than require him or her to come in for help.

“Terrorist groups are often able to radicalize individuals in the space of weeks or months to carry out simple, but lethal, homegrown attacks.”

Education

The educational system in Jordan is currently undergoing reform although, there is a lot of controversy surrounding it, and many felt that critical thinking and the introduction of Islamic values, i.e. how to interact in modern life with respect for others, were still missing in the reforms.

216 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

217 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

218 Anonymous, Female Prisoner, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (December 4, 2016).

A study in Ma'an in which sixty-two families of men aged 17-42 who had gone (n=54) or attempted to go (n=8) to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters reported that the men were indoctrinated into violent extremism in a space of two months to one year through social networks active on the Internet and in face-to-face encounters. In this study, the families were rated by the researchers as illiterate, dysfunctional, and having economic difficulties. The parents in all cases were blindsided by their sons' leaving home, were unable to identify early risks of radicalization, were unaware of the risks of extremism and, perhaps most importantly, stated they would not contact authorities as they did not trust them. Arguably, this leads one to conclude that in Jordan more education, particularly videos, that can target illiterate audiences, is needed for parents to learn about the virulent ideologies and terrorist recruitment that their youth may be subject to. Equally important, education about the early warning signs of radicalization into violent extremism and better trust with authorities must be cultivated.

“A truly effective helpline needs to be backed up by teams of trained psychologists, imams, social workers, and human rights lawyers and experts who can intervene to help address the factors propelling an individual into violent extremism.”

It is important also to teach critical thinking, and perhaps create prevention modules for late elementary school age children in order to inoculate them against virulent ideologies in support of violent extremism. Likewise, community education is important for imams, teachers, parents, medical care givers, and concerned community leaders to understand better the current virulent ideologies circulating in Jordan, to recognize early warning signs of radicalization, and offer appropriate tools to fight back.

Delegitimizing Terrorist Groups

As fundamentalist Islamic currents and Islamist movements, some embracing terrorism as legitimate, have pervaded some parts of Jordanian culture, terrorist groups such as ISIS, al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda have gained an ideological foothold in Jordan, with about seven percent of Jordanians saying these groups represent them.²¹⁹ Likewise, as terrorist groups active inside Jordan and in neighboring areas claim that they are reintroducing the “Islamic State” and adhering to Islamic values and are seen as holy by some, these groups and movements are gaining adherents in Jordan.

At first, as Fares Braizat points out “they had the perception of a high moral ground because they raised slogans of liberation and social justice.”²²⁰ However, just like Zarqawi and al-Qaeda in Iraq went too far and could be delegitimized as was seen in Iraq, when the Anbar Sunni population was supported to raise the Awakening movement, these groups can also be

219 Fares Braizat, Anne Speckhard, Amer Sabaileh, & Ardian Shajkovci “Determining Youth Radicalization in Jordan.” Manuscript submitted for publication [in press], Feb, 2017.

220 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November, 2, 2016).

delegitimized. NAMA's survey research showed that when al-Qaeda in Iraq bombed the hotels in Amman, killing many at wedding celebrations, when Hariri was assassinated, and when Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kaseasbeh was burned alive by ISIS, each of the related terrorist groups (AQ in Iraq, Hezbollah, and ISIS) suffered large drops in popularity in surveys rating their legitimacy. Clearly, these groups do much to delegitimize themselves, but their actions need to be published correctly and widely disseminated in a manner to reach youth effectively in order to help Jordanians see the truth and protect themselves from terrorists' false claims.

“Clearly, these groups do much to delegitimize themselves.”

When asked about the people in the southern city of Ma'an flying ISIS flags, an activist said, “What did the flags mean? For some, it means we are with Daesh; for most of them it is trying to make the government angry and pay attention [to our cause].” Then he went on to say that as people learned more about ISIS, they started changing, “Some of them were supporting Daesh, but now they saw the realities of who was supporting Daesh and changed their minds.”²²¹

Clearly showing the realities of ISIS is important to fighting the group. At ICSVE, we believe one of the best ways to fight ISIS is to raise the voices of actual ISIS defectors to denounce the group, video taping interviews of defectors and editing them into short but powerful video clips to load on the Internet and otherwise disseminate to youth.

In November 2016, short edited video clips of ISIS defectors denouncing ISIS were focus tested in Zarqa, Jordan, with a group of forty-eight youth, 30 young women and 18 young men from ages 14 to 26 with good results.²²² Youth watching the videos did not in any way question their authenticity and were disgusted and repulsed from most of the ISIS actions described by the defectors. It opened a very lively discussion that in many ways echoed some of the problems and issues in Zarqa as well, making clear that the videos could be used to make a diagnostic of what issues are most salient to youth who discuss them. It also made clear these videos could be systematically organized with pre and posttests to learn how they affect views on extremists groups and their ideologies. From our read of the focus groups, we saw that they were clearly very powerful tools for prevention and intervention. These focus groups were repeated by ICSVE in a village near Irbid with similar positive results.

When the ICSVE videos denouncing ISIS were shared with experts interviewed for this project, the response was also very positive. “This should be on all TV stations,” a Jordanian psychiatrist stated. “A young person watching it can realize that this is not a good Islamic thing to do, and it's a terrorist organization. They can work very much for prevention. Five

221 Mohammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma'an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

222 The International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE) has interviewed forty-three ISIS defectors at this point, most on video, with the idea that raising the voices of former ISIS members to denounce the group is one of the most powerful ways to delegitimize both the group and its ideology. These interviews have been edited into short video clips placed on the Internet with pro-ISIS names to be used to delegitimize the group and its ideology and fight back against ISIS recruitment. See: Anne Speckhard, “The Best Weapon To Defeat ISIS: Use Testimonial from Disillusioned Recruits Who've Defected Against Them;” and the videos at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCumpEsozixbl-PyK-w12hmnw>

minutes like this video can have a tremendous affect for prevention.” He also added that, “Many who defected discovered otherwise. ‘I went because, and then I found they are as bad as any government in the world, or worse.’ The torture and numbers they kill seems to affect members.”²²³

“One of the best ways to fight them is to raise the voices of actual ISIS defectors to denounce the group.”

Huthaifa Azzam also agreed that the videos of ISIS defectors denouncing the group were powerful tools. “These are great! This is how they are working. You are doing what ISIS is doing. ISIS is going to people through their emotions. You are doing the same. ISIS says to the young man, your sisters are being raped, and you are doing the same; true stories and true witnesses. This is how you get to the man on the street.”

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Likewise, Azzam felt that youth who had been deluded and returned from ISIS should be rehabilitated and used to delegitimize the group rather than sit in prison unattended. Speaking of the Jordanian American who wished to come home from ISIS in the first month after he joined, Azzam explained, “This young man turns back trying to get redemption, but we are making him into a criminal with a grudge. This is on all of humanity. There are people who were fooled, misled...they saw something they didn’t like. You said something really important: take this guy to give speeches at the mosque to say, ‘I went, and I saw this,’ to tell his story. But they want to put him in prison and torture him. From that, he will not come back. He will stay in limbo and the first organization that comes he will go to it, any extreme, they will use him and mostly likely in the wrong way. We suffer, and this is the way to weaken them, to bring back the people who saw and are convinced that they don’t work right. If we want to strengthen those organizations, we burn the bridge after those who go to them.”²²⁵

Prison Rehabilitation

Of greatest concern to Jordan are those returning from the conflict zone, weapons trained, ideologically indoctrinated and traumatized. Anywhere between 100 to 500 are said to have returned, with more than 1,000 still believed to be active in the conflict zones who could at some point attempt to return or aim their sites on Jordan.²²⁶ Currently, Jordan forbids foreign fighters to return, and those that have returned are prosecuted and imprisoned, with some taking

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224 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 3, 2016).

225 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 3, 2016).

226 As mentioned previously, estimates are that more than 3,000 Jordanians have already traveled into the conflict zones. Many of the interviewed pointed out the government’s reluctance to share official counts. Counter-terrorism expert Hasan Abu Hanya said 250 returned. A retired officer from Military Intelligence said 500 had been killed and a retired intel agent stated, “855 terrorists were killed in Mosul and south Syria which is great news, cost us nothing.” Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016) and Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016). .

part in prison rehabilitation programs.²²⁷

One respondent stated that, “250 guys came back from ISIS. They are all in prison. Just one woman is out of prison. Everyone who comes back from Syria goes to prison, except at the beginning. The ones who were with the Syrian revolution, they are not in prison. The ones with ISIS are all in prison.”²²⁸

“In 1991 we started a prison rehabilitation program in the prison,” a retired intel agent recounted. “It became more advanced in later stages. In my way, in my office, I try to get all his information, comparing with others, and then I start to talk to him as a human being. As much as I can succeed in that, I am happy. Some of them we release. He becomes a volunteer agent to us. One of them is phoning me at 3 a.m., when I am sleeping, with real information. I started it [the program]. It was there in 1989, when the Afghani jihad started affecting Jordan. It started off in a simple way. Someone who was fighting in Afghanistan, he got put in prison. We used to do a deal with him. He would be tried. If he would be cooperative and give us all his information and testify in the court against others, then he has to prove his credibility via police protocol. To go there on a daily basis and report in. We keep in touch with intel, three times a day, and he needs to give information, a true story once a week. Then we get him to recruit others with this inclination. He gives speeches opposite to the ideology in his own neighborhood and talks them out of it.”²²⁹

However, prison rehabilitation has fallen out of popularity, “because of this big terrorism issue, a lot of people lost the zeal for this program. With extremists in Saudi Arabia, they were rehabilitated and released, but they went back to being involved.”²³⁰ Jordan has had experience of prisoners who did not go through rehabilitation who were released and went right back to terrorism—Zarqawi the most infamous among them.

Little is known about the current Jordanian prison rehabilitation program as outsiders have not been allowed to view it or interview prisoners. From 2006-2008, the author served as the chair of a NATO Research Task Group that Princess Aisha served on. At that time, Princess Aisha decided to work with prison officials to emulate a prison rehabilitation program written by the author for the U.S. Department of Defense to apply to the 20,000+ detainees and 800 juveniles then held by the Americans in Iraq.²³¹ The program relied on both psychological interventions

“Of greatest concern to Jordan are those returning from the conflict zone, weapons trained and ideologically indoctrinated.”

227 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

228 Hasan Abu Hanya, Jordanian Counter-Terrorism Researcher/Author, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

229 Anonymous, Retired security official, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 10, 2016).

230 Ibid.

231 See: Anne Speckhard, “Prison and Community CBased Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs for Extremists Involved in Militant Jihadi Terrorism Ideologies and Activities,” *RTO-TR-HFM-140 - Psychosocial, Organizational and Cultural Aspects of Terrorism, Aspects psychosociaux, organisationnels et culturels du terrorisme*, November 2011, available at <http://ftp.rta.nato.int/public//PubFullText/RTO/TR/RTO-TR-HFM-140//TR-HFM-140-11.pdf>; Anne

and Islamic challenge, and a similar program inspired by it was introduced into Jordan. A retired Special Forces General who helped with the program wasn't sure it was ever fully implemented.²³² In any case there was agreement that a combination of psychology and Islamic challenge was necessary for success in Jordan.

Another retired intel officer from the military remarked, "a rehabilitation system, if it doesn't go through psychologists and imams, you will waste your time. It has to be religious."²³³

Fares Braizat cited 100 foreign fighters as returned and optimistically stated, "Everyone who came back went through a rehabilitation program. Some have been released from it and are not managed by PSD." In rehabilitation, he continued, "they get exposed to religious preachers and scholars to debate them, and are seen by professional psychologists and medical staff to look after their health and well-being. Anyone who has been through that process of fighting and sense of enchantment, but then disillusionment, needs help. They went for something different, to a land of justice equality and protection and standing up to wrongdoing, but they were disillusioned and disenchanted."²³⁴

Others were more cynical about Jordan's rehabilitation program stating that it was in name only. In any case it is a much needed feature of fighting extremism in Jordan as those released from prison, as well as those serving time as violent extremists, can spread their virulent ideology and remain a danger to society if not rehabilitated while in prison and reintegrated into society once released.

Those who are returning from groups like ISIS and al-Nusra have witnessed a great deal of trauma and brutality, and also have been heavily indoctrinated into Takfiri ideologies. They require serious rehabilitation efforts and will also require support reintegrating them into their communities upon release. There are many cases of ISIS defectors who have flipped back into the group after returning home and while in prison.²³⁵ It is difficult to know if someone who has been inside a terrorist group is truly rehabilitating, or will fall back into terrorism at the first

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233 Anonymous, Retired Military Intelligence Officer, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 1, 2016).

234 Fares Braizat, Researcher, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November, 2, 2016).

235 Anne Speckhard, Ahmet S. Yayla, and Ardian Shajkovci, "Defected from ISIS or Simply Returned, and for How Long? Challenges for the West in Dealing with Returning Foreign Fighters," *Homeland Security Affairs*, Issue (forthcoming), 2017.

“Those who are returning from groups like ISIS and al-Nusra have witnessed a great deal of trauma and brutality, and also have been heavily indoctrinated into Takfiri ideologies. They require serious rehabilitation efforts and will also require support reintegrating them into their communities upon release.”

sign of difficulties, as all of the challenges that existed to motivate him to join usually are still there upon his return.

Free Syrian Army fighter, Huthaifa Azzam, recounted how difficult it is to know if an ISIS cadre has truly given up his commitment to violent extremism, citing issues they had in the Free Syrian Army of ISIS defectors pretending to have defected and then attacking the FSA. “Now, even if he is 100% honest, we won’t release him for a year, we need to be sure,” Azzam explained saying that any ISIS defector who turns himself into the FSA is kept for treatment, “not in jails. They are in a house where daily they have scholars coming to them for deradicalization. It’s dawah training [Islamic teaching] to be sure all the sick ideas of ISIS and its ideology are removed from their minds. ISIS people are very dangerous and very difficult. Even after many years they can revert.” He went on to tell of a case that they pretended to release, only to find out the person was still with ISIS and tried to attack their guys. “He was 18 months with them. They gave him a special room, not in jail, a laptop, the best food as they are having, a daily bath, he could play football with our guys, all of this treatment for 18 months. And this was the result. It is not easy to change those thoughts²³⁶

“There are many cases of ISIS defectors who have flipped back into the group after returning home and while in prison.”

Azzam also noted that children, particularly, have been victimized and traumatized in ISIS. “The worst thing that happened in ISIS was raping these boys. I know a Syrian mother who paid \$80,000 to get her son back from the Cubs. Upon his return, he was being treated many months for the rapes he went through. He was Syrian, a very beautiful kid, 14-years-old.”²³⁷

Social Stigma & Reintegration

When a person is released from prison, he must also be reintegrated into his community and overcome any social stigma attached to his stint in terrorism, as well as be watched to be sure he does not continue in or return to it. Likewise, families of those who had gone as foreign fighters may also suffer in terms of social standing in their communities or, on the contrary, be seen as heroic. The risk of stigmatization, or claiming heroism or “martyrdom” status, can all possibly lead to others in the family facing harsher circumstances or being interested to also go and deciding to follow their siblings, cousins, or spouses into the conflict zone. Thus, family members of those who have gone as foreign fighters should also receive care and treatment to prevent them from also being recruited into violent extremism.

A father whose son was imprisoned upon his return to Jordan after fighting for Jabhat al-Nusra commented on what he saw as governmental hypocrisy in condemning his son in the context of shifting politics that at first supported foreign fighters going from Jordan to bring down Assad

236 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 3, 2016).

237 Huthaifa, Azzam, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter and Islamic Ideologue, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 3, 2016).

to a policy where they are now refused return to Jordan. “There was media in which the King and the Prime Minister rejected what was going on in Syria. The whole world rejected what was happening in Syria. Only Russia and Iran accepted it. The widespread public opinion created a response in our youth. Our youth are human beings. They saw the killings. Before the game changed, the borders [between Jordan and Syria] were open. Then they started putting cameras and closed the borders.” Indeed, in 2011, King Abdullah told journalists that he would abdicate if he was Bashar Assad.²³⁸

One Jordanian returnee who had fought with the Free Syrian Army complained, asking, “How do 3000 Jordanians go to Syria? Our border is not out of control. It’s all controlled. Even the Jordanians admit it; we gave permission to go, but if anyone tries to come back we have orders to shoot to kill.” Feeling that the Jordanian government might have liked to get rid of its jihadi minded citizens, he continued, “The same thing happened with the Egyptian Jihad. Jamiyah Islamia was having daily clashes with Mubarak, so they asked, ‘Why don’t we send them? Open the prisons and let them all go to Afghanistan?’ They made it easy for them to leave. All the governments were sending those people, take your passport and go to Algeria, Afghanistan, don’t give us any trouble. They were exporting their troubles outside. Since that time, we were fighting against that [Takfir] ideology.”²³⁹

“How do 3000 Jordanians go to Syria? Our border is not out of control.”

The father in Ma’an who managed to bring back his son and son-in-law from al-Nusra is unhappy with how they were treated upon their return, and stated, “I went to the head of the Army and I brought them back in legally, although they took them to court and they stayed in prison. They should have dealt with them through dialogue because neither was an ideologue. They did business [before leaving] in Aqaba with women and men. They are not introverts and had no grudge on society. It’s not like what was going on in Iraq.”

When asked if his son went through a rehabilitation program, his father answered, “No, he was in solitary and we were only allowed to see him once a week, until there were demonstrations in Ma’an. That won us three times a week. It shouldn’t be like this. They used to allow the smuggler and outlaw two visits in a week, and these guys they didn’t treat well at all. They wanted to humiliate the family also. He had no problem with the state. He went to serve another cause. Why did they punish him? We don’t have a problem with the Jordanian state. They had a problem in Syria. Why did the state turn them into enemies? They should not turn them into enemies. If there is an external attack on Jordan, they will fight with the Army. He loves Jordan.”²⁴⁰ It should be noted that his son, despite his father’s complaints about unfair treatment,

238 Reuters, “Jordan’s King Abdullah: If I were Syrian President, I Would Resign,” *Haaretz*, November 14, 2011, available at <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/jordan-s-king-abdullah-if-i-were-syrian-president-i-would-resign-1.395541>

239 Anonymous, Former Free Syrian Army Fighter, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 7, 2016).

240 Ma’an father of two sons who fought in Syria, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11,

is already released from prison having served only a short sentence.

Research

“We need scientific research here in Ma’an, “ an activist in Ma’an, also one of the hotbeds of violent extremism in Jordan, stated. “It’s easy for us, here to study these families and guys who came back from Syria or the families of those who went to Syria. It’s not more than 150 families. But we need expert guidance and funds for the helpers. I have a video recording of some of the kids on the street cursing the police and the King. I told the King, I need your help to learn what is the real problem. No one reaches the grass roots of this problem. It’s all superficial reasons. We need to do good research on it. The governments give money to fight terrorism, and there are people giving lectures saying we need to fight terrorism, but they don’t even know what the root problems are.”²⁴¹

“We need to fight terrorism, but they don’t even know what the root problems are.”

Indeed, much more research aimed at understanding the profiles of those who get on the terrorism trajectory—to learn what propels them forward on it and what interventions can be put in place to prevent and stop individuals from progressing into terrorism—needs to be done.

Addressing Perceived and Real Grievances

Efforts to delegitimize groups like ISIS are extremely important to fight the power of their online and face-to-face recruitment, as are prison deradicalization and reintegration programs, yet these do not tackle the underlying issues that created vulnerabilities and motivations for joining violent extremist groups, and these, too, must be countered. “Counter-narrative can be effective, but if you don’t want to tackle the real issue, it’s not going to work,” a journalist stated pointing out that the real issues are related to political freedoms, stating, “ political freedoms are the reasons why people resort to violence. If someone is angry about something and you are not tackling that, just telling him that he’s going to have a great life, it won’t work.”²⁴² Indeed, prevention and interventions and research are all needed but shutting down the terrorist groups, delegitimizing their ideologies and addressing the grievances, vulnerabilities and motivations that they address is what must occur to keep Jordan the safe and stable country it aims to be.

“If someone is angry about something and you are not tackling that, just telling him that he’s going to have a great life, it won’t work.”

2016).

241 Mohmammed, Activist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Ma’an, Jordan (November 11, 2016).

242 Rula Amin, Journalist, Interviewed by Anne Speckhard, Amman, Jordan (November 8, 2016).

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