



JORDAN, ISIS, #WEAREALLMUADH

By Tally Helfont



Tally Helfont is the [Director](#) of FPRI's Program on the Middle East. Her current research focuses on the regional balance of power, the Levant and the GCC, and U.S. policy therein. She is also a Contributing Analyst for Wikistrat's Middle East Desk, a crowd-sourcing consultancy. Ms. Helfont has instructed training courses in Civil Information Management to U.S. Military Civil Affairs Units and Human Terrain Teams assigned to Iraq and Afghanistan. She is the author of the FPRI monograph, [The Palestinian Islamic Jihad's U.S. Cell \[1988-95\]: The Ideological Foundations of Its Propaganda Strategy](#). Her writings have appeared in Orbis, INSS Insight, and al Majalla, as well as in FPRI's E-Notes and Geopoliticus blog.

Jordan's fight with the Islamic State, to employ an apt colloquialism, just got real. On February 4, a gruesome video was released by the Islamic State (IS) showing Jordanian pilot Lt. Muadh al-Kasasbeh (26), who had been held by IS since December 24th after his [F-16 crashed in Syria](#), being burned alive in a cage. Ripples have been felt throughout the region since his capture, only to grow into waves of discontent following the release of this disturbing video.

At the highest echelons of the Kingdom, King Abdullah II called al-Kasasbeh's murder "cowardly" and signaled during his meeting with U.S. senators that the [gloves were off](#) and retaliation was imminent. For the King, it was not just about al-Kasasbeh. He [said](#), "We are waging this war to protect our faith, our values and human principles and our war for their sake will be relentless and will hit them in their own ground." Army spokesman General Mamduh al-Amiri struck a similar cord, saying "The blood of the martyr will not have been shed in vain and... vengeance will be proportional to this catastrophe that has struck all Jordanians." Likewise, government spokesman Mohammad al-Momani said "We are talking about a collaborative effort between coalition members to intensify efforts to stop extremism and terrorism to undermine, degrade and eventually finish Daesh," using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

At the popular level, the slogan "We are all Muadh" and its corresponding hashtags #WeareallMuadh, #IamMuath, #كلنا_معاد among other calls for revenge were also prolific. This murder seems to have galvanized Jordanian society as well, even softening some of those who criticized the King for embroiling the Kingdom in the U.S.-led war that would provoke such a backlash. Muadh's father was one such critic. "Jordan shouldn't be going on the offensive and attacking fellow Muslims," he [once argued](#), but his tone has changed in the wake of his son's murder. "Now he says the coalition must eradicate ISIS." Jawdat Kasasbeh, Muadh's brother, argued that this act would sour would-be supporters of ISIS in Jordan. [He explained in an interview](#):

A large number of Jordanians used to sympathise with them because they claimed to follow the principles of Islam. But thankfully, what happened to my brother has proven to the world, and especially to the Jordanian people, that [ISIS] is nothing but a terrorist, criminal organisation — and it should be stopped. This terrorist organisation tried to incite hatred in Jordan and within the people. But we, Muath's family, will not allow them to ruin our country. We will stand strong, all Jordanians will stick together, we are one family, and hopefully this group will be [destroyed].

For its part, Jordan initiated its "retaliation" less than 24 hours after the murder of its pilot by [hanging two Iraqi jihadists](#) in its custody, one of whom — a woman named Sajida al-Rishawi — the Islamic State had previously demanded in exchange for the

Japanese hostage, whom it later beheaded. Jordan vowed to step its sorties against ISIS to unprecedented levels, reportedly already killing [55 ISIS militants](#) on Thursday, including a senior commander known as the “Prince of Nineveh,” by means of Jordanian airstrikes. Rumors that King Abdullah himself would fly some of these sorties were soon proven to be just that, but the King’s [Hashemite Royal Court](#) Facebook page did feature this photograph of the monarch in military garb to demonstrate his personal commitment to smash ISIS.



Jordan’s King Abdullah in uniform, taken from the [Royal Hashemite Court’s](#) Facebook account on February 3 after he vowed to intensify Jordan’s strikes against ISIS.

Jordanians are the not the only ones to respond. Muslim clerics across the Middle East also expressed disgust, saying such a form of killing was considered despicable by Islam. Al-Azhar, Sunni Islam’s most prestigious center of learning located in Egypt, went as far as to [call for](#) the “killing and crucifixion of militants from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS),” while expressing its outrage over the murder of the Jordanian pilot.

While statements of solidarity have been made across the region, in Europe, and elsewhere, the United States is supporting Jordan in more tangible ways as well.

The United States has been invested in Jordan’s stability for quite some time. The Kingdom’s geographic location, wedged between both American allies and adversaries, necessitated the formation of strong ties early on. The characters of the monarchs that have ruled Jordan during this time – King Hussein and later King Abdullah II to be precise – facilitated the cultivation of these ties. For its part, resource-poor Jordan has always needed a patron, making the relationship as much as an imperative for survival as a prudent strategic alliance. As such, America’s investment in Jordan has therefore translated into sustained political support and strategic cooperation on the one hand, and economic and military aid on the other (since 1951 and 1957, respectively).

Arguments have been made repeatedly over the past decades that supporting Jordanian stability is crucial *now more than ever*. Whether this was true each time it was uttered is a matter of opinion but the fact that the Obama Administration believes this to be the case now, in February 2015, can clearly be seen. Though the United States and Jordan [are not linked by a formal treaty](#), they have signed a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) that have underpinned their regional and international cooperation. Most recently, the U.S. and Jordan had reached such an agreement in 2008, in which the United States provided \$660 million in annual foreign assistance to Jordan over a five-year period. This agreement expired as of FY2014.

However, following King Abdullah’s visit to Washington in December 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry and Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh [signed a new MOU](#) on February 3, 2015 aimed at increasing U.S. assistance to the Government Jordan to \$1 billion per year for the FY2015-FY2017 period. According to the U.S. State Department’s press release, this sum “which reflects our strategic partnership and the United States’ firm commitment to Jordan’s stability ... is designed to address Jordan’s short-term, extraordinary needs, including those related to regional instability and rising energy costs.”

These loose references, when dissected, refer to an effort on the part of the United States a) to buttress the Jordanian state in light of ongoing unrest and political upheaval in several other countries in the region, b) to further Jordan's economic development, and c) to help “the efforts Jordan is undertaking at the forefront of the fight against ISIL and other extremist ideology and terrorism, the influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq, the disruption of foreign energy supplies, and other unprecedented strains.”

Jordan is one of four Arab partner countries – the others include Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates – tapped by the U.S. to engage in anti-ISIS attacks since they began last September. However, Jordan is also the Arab partner who is most [directly endangered by ISIS](#), which is ostensibly operating on its borders and preying on some of its towns. Jordan’s intention to step up its efforts against the Islamic State will therefore be bankrolled to some extent by this new MOU.

Acts by ISIS, like the brutal murder of Lt. Muadh al-Kasasbeh, will not only turn many would-be sympathizers away from the group in a manner reminiscent of the Iraqi *Sabwa* or Awakening in 2007-8 in which al-Qaeda’s brutality soured the locals support for the group, but will also serve as a call to arms for regional powers to step up their efforts against the its growing power and influence. Though such acts should and have been condemned in every corner of the globe, they may serve as the catalysts to collectively turn the tide against the vicious threat that is ISIS.

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684

For more information, contact Eli Gilman at 215-732-3774, ext. 103, email fpri@fpri.org, or visit us at www.fpri.org