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Country Report on Terrorism 2016 - Chapter 2 - Jordan

Overview: Jordan remained a committed partner on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism in 2016. As a regional leader in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Jordan played an important role in Coalition successes in degrading the terrorist group's territorial control and operational reach. Jordan faced a marked increase in terrorist threats, both domestically and along its borders. Jordanian security forces thwarted several plots and apprehended numerous violent extremists, but the year ended with the deadliest terrorist incident the country has witnessed in over a decade. Fourteen people were killed during a series of clashes between gunmen and security forces in and around the southern city of Karak on December 18. The dead included a Canadian tourist, two Jordanian civilians, seven security personnel, and four attackers. The incident began when the perpetrators attacked security personnel investigating reports of an explosion in their rented apartment, which was followed by a five-hour standoff at Karak Castle, a site popular with tourists. Security operations in the vicinity two days later led to a shootout between gunmen and Jordanian security forces, resulting in the death of four security personnel.

Attacks in 2016 predominantly targeted Jordan's security institutions: the Jordan Armed Forces (JAF), General Intelligence Directorate (GID), and Public Security Directorate (PSD). Jordan continued to be a target for terrorist groups, including ISIS and al-Qa'ida, for several reasons, including its proximity to regional conflicts in Iraq and Syria, the state's official rejection of Salafi-Jihadi interpretations of Islam, and its membership in the Defeat-ISIS Coalition.

Border security remains an overarching priority for the Government of Jordan, given fears that violence from the conflict in neighboring Syria will spill over into its territory. Government of Jordan concerns are amplified by the presence of ISIS-aligned group Jaysh Khalid bin Waleed (JKW) in southwest Syria, just miles from Jordan's border.

There are many Jordanian nationals among foreign terrorist fighters in Iraq and Syria. While the number of Jordanian foreign terrorist fighters traveling to Iraq and Syria declined in 2016 – consistent with global trends and as a result of Jordan's continued border security efforts – the threat of domestic radicalization remains.

2016 Terrorist Incidents: Jordanian citizens were linked to terrorist cells and conducted a number of terrorist attacks in Jordan. The attack against a GID sub-facility in Baqa'a in June, the assassination of a Jordanian journalist in Amman in September, and the assault launched by a suspected ISIS cell in Karak in December, all involved Jordanian citizens. High-profile attacks included:

- On June 6, a lone gunman attacked a GID sub-facility near the Palestinian refugee camp of Baqa'a, in the early morning hours. Five personnel were killed.

- On June 21, suspected ISIS members attacked a Jordanian border post near Rukban, along Jordan's northeast border, with a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device. The attack resulted in the deaths of seven security personnel, with several more wounded.
- On December 18, 14 people, including four attackers, were killed in the southern city of Karak and the nearby town of Qatraneh when gunmen opened fire on PSD at multiple locations. The attackers eventually holed up in Karak Castle for a five-hour gunfight with authorities.
- On December 20, four security personnel were killed in a standoff with suspected terrorists near Karak.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The State Security Court (SSC) is the primary legal apparatus with jurisdiction over crimes that touch on national security, including terrorism cases. Amendments to the SSC law, adopted in 2014, attempted to limit the court's jurisdiction to five crimes – treason, espionage, terrorism, drug-related offenses, and currency forgery, although the SSC jurisdiction was extended to a broad interpretation of these crimes. The amendments also placed civilian judges on the SSC bench, although all prosecutors remain military officers. During 2016 Jordanian authorities took legal action against numerous individuals accused of terrorism under Jordanian law. SSC verdicts related to terrorism are published almost daily in local media. Some of the more prominent cases follow:

- On July 13 the SSC filed charges against 21 suspected ISIS affiliates in connection with the pre-emptive March raid on an alleged ISIS safe house in Irbid. The defendants were charged with carrying out terrorist acts, using weapons that resulted in the death of a Jordanian soldier, possessing weapons and explosives, and “propagating ISIS ideology,” a charge often used for online activity.
- On August 4, the SCC sentenced to death the perpetrator of the June 6 attack on a GID sub-facility near Baqa'a that resulted in the death of five security personnel. A second defendant was charged with selling a weapon to the shooter and sentenced to one year in prison.
- On December 20, the SSC sentenced to death the man accused of murdering Jordanian journalist Nahed Hattar on September 25. The attacker was charged with carrying out a deadly terrorist attack, incitement, premeditated murder, and possession of an illegal firearm.
- The SSC prosecuted several individuals in 2016 for “propagating ISIS ideology.” Sentences for such cases typically last two to three years.

The Government of Jordan adopted its first counterterrorism law in 2006, in the wake of the 2005 Amman hotel bombings. This law was subsequently amended in 2014 in response to increasing threats to Jordan from violent extremist organizations operating domestically and across the border in Iraq and Syria. The new amendments enacted harsher sentences in terrorism cases and broadened the scope and definition of activities considered terrorism to facilitate the Government of Jordan's ability to prosecute material and ideological support for terrorism. Following passage of the 2014 amendments, Jordan's counterterrorism law broadly defined terrorism to include speech-related offenses deemed to “harm relations with a foreign state, undermine the regime, or expose Jordan to harmful acts.” Human Rights-focused NGOs criticized the law's implementation on the grounds it restricts freedom of expression and peaceful dissent against the government. Since the amendments came into effect in 2014, authorities have arrested several journalists and religious leaders for speech-related offenses.

GID is the primary government agency responsible for counterterrorism, and it operates with support from various elements within the JAF, PSD, and Gendarmerie. Although Jordan's civilian and military security agencies are more professional and effective than others in the region, increased terrorist threats strained their incident response capabilities and coordination mechanisms in 2016. The Government of Jordan is implementing measures to improve interagency coordination among security agencies during responses to terrorism-related events. Notably, during the December attacks in Karak, the Government of Jordan activated the National Center for Security and Crisis Management under the direction of King Abdullah II; the facility served as the coordination hub for the GID, JAF, PSD, and Gendarmerie response to the incidents.

Jordan continued to reinforce its border defenses and surveillance capabilities in response to terrorist and criminal threats emanating from its 230 mile border with Syria and 112 mile border with Iraq. In 2016, the JAF maintained an increased presence along the borders with Syria and Iraq, and continued implementation of the Jordan Border Security Program to improve the JAF and Jordan Customs' surveillance and interdiction capabilities to deter, detect, and interdict terrorist and other illicit activity on the frontier and at ports of entry (POEs). Jordan conducts official screening of travelers at POEs, including at airports, and uses biometric systems in line with international standards. Jordan also routinely provides advanced passenger information to partner nations, and shares names with INTERPOL watchlists and databases. Jordanian authorities continued to use the U.S.-provided Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) at unofficial border crossing sites along the Syrian border to complement the border screening system at official POEs. Jordan also participated in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program.

On March 1-2, Jordan's security services launched a preemptive raid on a suspected ISIS safe-house in the northern city of Irbid. The operation lasted more than 12 hours and resulted in the death of one JAF officer and seven suspected terrorists. Jordan's security services had previously arrested 13 individuals with suspected links to the cell and rounded up several more in the weeks following the raid.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Jordan is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body, and also a member of the Coalition's Counter-ISIS Finance Group. Jordan's financial intelligence unit, the Anti Money Laundering and Counter Terrorist financing Unit (AMLU Jordan), has been a member of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units since 2012.

AMLU Jordan routinely receives and responds to requests for information from counterpart units. Under the obligations of the UN Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and al-Qa'ida sanctions regime, other relevant resolutions regularly disseminate the names of designated individuals and entities to financial institutions. AMLU Jordan also monitors U.S. designations under executive order (E.O.) 13224, and shares this information internally with the Technical Committee. The number of suspicious transaction reports received by AMLU Jordan in 2016 nearly doubled from 2015 – a reflection of AMLU Jordan's efforts to educate currency exchangers, real estate developers, and commercial banks on identifying potentially suspicious transactions. AMLU Jordan transferred a number of cases for prosecution; however, information on prosecution outcomes was not available.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*:

<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Countering Violent Extremism: King Abdullah II continued to promote his "Amman Declaration" of 2004, calling for tolerance and peace within the Islamic community, and rejecting "wanton aggression and terrorism." The King has repeatedly voiced Jordan's commitment to countering violent extremist messaging and rhetoric, noting at the 2016 UN General Assembly that, "The central and most vital battleground for this defining war of our generation is the mind. The despicable, damaging ideology of hate... must be confronted with a counter-narrative of hope, tolerance, and peace." The Jordanian government's countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions included counter-messaging and religious education, awareness-raising, and rehabilitation support for former violent extremists. Jordan worked with the UN Development Programme to develop a holistic National Strategy on Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism, which is expected to establish roles and responsibilities for government entities and promote the involvement of non-governmental organizations, civil society, and the private sector in CVE initiatives.

Regional and International Cooperation: Jordan is a founding member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and is a member of the Arab League, the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and the Proliferation Security Initiative.

Jordan continued to host and conduct training for Palestinian Authority Security Forces and Civil Defense, in addition to other police forces from around the region.