



INTERVIEW WITH DR. SAUD AL-SHARAFAT

JORDAN'S SECURITY CHALLENGES

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ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE:

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Wikistrat: In your assessment, what are the main threats or challenges to Jordan's security today?

Saud: There are a lot of factors that affect the security situation of Jordan. We have to look at this issue from a holistic perspective. As many observers have noticed, now in Jordan we have a lot of problems dealing with the economic issue, the social issue, and the political issue regarding the peace process, the deal of the century. All of these things are affecting the security issue.

One of the critical positions that Jordan faces from my point of view is that all of these issues are combining in one moment. In the past, we had a political issue, but you had a very solid economy. But now, I feel that we are going through a very original way. There's a kind of stagnation, and we have a lot of problems at one point.

Wikistrat: Understood. And looking at more recent events with Turkey's military operation in northeast Syria and the Turkey-Russia ceasefire, how do you think that affects Jordan?

Saud: I think it will not affect Jordan directly, but in an indirect way it will affect Jordan. It may do some penetration in the security, let's say, in the mid-term and long-term.

Because, if we look at the Jordan foreign fighters who are in Syria, there are a lot of Jordanian leaders in Hurras al-Din [al-Qaeda's branch in Syria]. At the end of the day, the Europe Union, other countries, the United States, Turkey will find some kind of solution for the foreign fighters. You need to look at this scenario: What if those countries bring all of those guys, bring all the foreign fighters, bring the Arab fighters, some of them are Jordanian, and force Jordan to deal with their problem?

What are they going to do? Unfortunately, until now, we haven't talked about this issue. In Jordan, nobody talks about this issue. Or studying the ideas about the international tribunal for IS fighters? As an expert in terrorism and in counter-terrorism and the globalization aspect of terrorism, and the security issue, I don't feel comfortable with that situation.

Wikistrat: How do you see the current condition? For example, how it impacts the youth?

Saud: I don't think it will affect them in a direct way, but a combination of these obstacles and problems may lead to more radicalization in Jordan.

Wikistrat: There are many reports that there is a large Salafi-jihadi community in Jordan. So, do you think that they could become more popular or more prominent in Jordan in the coming months because of all of the factors that you mentioned - because of the politics, the economic situation and everything we just discussed?

Saud: Because of what happened in Syria, what happened in Iraq, and what happened in Libya, in Jordan people don't express their feelings but there's more support for Salafiyya (Salafism). Belief in Salafiyya can be seen out in the street and the coffee shops, how people deal with it.

Wikistrat: What does the stabbing incident in Jarash on November 6 indicate about the terrorism threat to Jordan? Does it change your assessment of the threat of extremism in the country?

Saud: We still don't know all the details, but my first assessment, from what I read and heard from different sources, I think the perpetrator is an ISIS lone wolf. Maybe the motives are not really revealed from the GID, but a lot of indicators lead me to believe the attacker intended to kill the tourists mainly because he has been radicalized by ISIS propaganda in social media. I don't exclude the probability that he is motivated by the death of Al Baghdadi, given the timing of the stabbing incident.

Wikistrat: Speaking of Baghdadi, his death was presented by President Trump as "the top national security priority of my administration." Baghdadi was no doubt important, but how much does his death really matter for the Daesh [ISIS] threat to Jordan?

Saud: Baghdadi's killing is an important step in the fight against ISIS, and Jordan – like many other Muslim countries – welcomes his death. But the threat of extremism, posed by the ideology of ISIS, remains. As we could see from the stabbing attack in Jarash, Baghdadi's death will not stop the ISIS threat to Jordan security; on the contrary, it will lead to a more serious threat from ISIS

lone wolves. So, at least in the short term, I'm worried that we will see more attacks in Jordan by people who are inspired by the ideology of Daesh.

Wikistrat: Are there any other security or terrorism-related issues that you think are worth discussing?

Saud: You need to know to look at this issue from a holistic approach. Jordan faces the terrorist threat, even though we have Mukhabarat [security services]. About a month ago, they announced that they have a cell of six people, one of them is a Syrian. They tried to plan a terrorist act and to kidnap one officer from the GID. This means that those sleeper cells, lone wolves, are still working.

Wikistrat: Looking here in the context of northeast Syria, not just in terms of what Turkey has been doing but also at Trump's decision to withdraw the US forces from that area... How does that really impact Jordan? How does Jordan see this decision by Trump, by the United States, and how will the US withdrawal really impact Jordan's security?

Saud: It's not appropriate for cooperation and collaboration in fighting terrorism and sharing information. This has a negative impact on all of this stuff. Maybe, people will begin now to stop sharing information [with the US] because they don't trust you anymore. Why should I share information with you and then you stab me in the back?

Wikistrat: How do you think this impacts Jordan's efforts to fight Daesh? How does this really impact Jordan's anti-ISIS fight?

Saud: Even though you have this negative reaction for Trump's move, this absolutely will not affect Jordan's efforts to fight Daesh. Not because they are in Syria or fighting Kurds, but because Daesh is number one enemy for Jordan.

In Jordan, there are many, many examples of Daesh or terrorism in general trying to hit Jordan in secret and many cities in Jordan: Amman, Karak, Irbid, Zarqa. So, it will not affect Jordan's fight against Daesh very much.

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