

# **Urban Terrorism in the Arab World: Introducing a Dataset of Jihadist Attack Plots in Jordan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Few regions have been more plagued by terrorism than the Arab world. However, knowledge of the phenomenon's nature is limited by a lack of attack plot data for most Arab countries. This article contributes to addressing this gap by presenting a dataset of jihadist incidents in Jordan from 1994 until the end of 2018. Based on recent progress in measuring terrorism, the dataset does not only include launched attacks but also foiled and failed attack plots to give a more accurate and comprehensive overview of the threat. It provides answers to fundamental descriptive questions such as how many plots there have been, which jihadist actors have been responsible, and what type of attacks they have attempted to carry out. This work matters because it reveals the main characteristics of the jihadist terrorist threat to the Kingdom. This enables future studies to provide more empirically based explanations of what causes jihadist terrorism in Jordan than previously possible.

Keywords: Jordan; jihadism; terrorism; targeting; tactics; dataset

## **Introduction**

In 2005, the Jordanian capital Amman was rocked by the most lethal terrorist attack in the country's history. At the behest of al-Qaida in Iraq's (AQI) Jordanian leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, three Iraqi men and one woman crossed into Jordan on November 5. Four days later, the woman and one of the men made their way to the Radisson Hotel, while another went to Grand Hyatt, and the last went to Days Inn. They were all carrying explosive belts. A little before 21:00, they attacked. As the dust settled, sixty people had been killed.<sup>1</sup>

Urban terrorism carried out during peacetime—such as the Amman hotel bombings in 2005—has unfortunately by no means been uncommon in the Arab world. However, knowledge of the phenomenon's nature and scale is limited by a lack of attack plot data for most Arab countries.<sup>2</sup> As Horgan points out, descriptive analyses based on primary sources are "the building block[s]" of all rigorous research.<sup>3</sup> They are the first step to understanding the causes and drivers of any phenomenon. Acknowledging this significant role of description, this article aims to provide a foundation for further research to build upon.

A large body of research on terrorism is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database and the ITERATE database.<sup>4</sup> They underreport the number of terrorist attacks—particularly in Arab countries. Moreover, they do not include unsuccessful plots, which is necessary to give a more accurate picture of the threat.

By contrast, I present a dataset that not only includes a detailed overview of attacks but also of failed and foiled plots in Jordan. To my knowledge, the dataset is the most comprehensive overview of jihadist plotting in any Arab country that is publicly available. I demonstrate its utility by using it to explore how the jihadist threat<sup>5</sup> in Jordan has evolved since the first suspected cases in 1994 until the end of 2018. I look at the variation in plot frequency and examine trends in group linkages, targeting selection, and tactics.

The data suggests that the risk of attacks has been high, especially when al-Zarqawi was the leader of AQI in the mid-2000s and after the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq in 2014. Yet the threat has been largely contained. I found one hundred plots for the entire period. Jordanian authorities foiled eighty-two plots, two failed due to a perpetrator mistake, while sixteen materialized into attacks.

While many civilian Muslims were killed in the 2005 hotel bombings, the attack seems to be an outlier. Targeting of Muslim civilians is a controversial question in jihadist ideology. Nearly all plots have been directed against targets that most jihadists view as legitimate, such as the Jordanian security apparatus, Westerners, local Christians, and liquor stores. In the 2010s, the trend has been toward increased targeting of the security apparatus.

Relatively little has changed in terms of tactics. Armed assaults with firearms and bombings have been the preferred modes of operation. The most significant changes to occur are that the networks responsible for terrorist plotting in the country have become increasingly autonomous from the mother organization abroad and that single-actor terrorism has become more common in the 2010s than before.

Existing research shows that these tactical trends also are present in other contexts where jihadists operate clandestinely, such as Europe and North America.<sup>6</sup> While more research is required to draw definitive conclusions, my findings suggest that although they are located close to the jihadists' center of gravity in Syria and Iraq, jihadist tactics in Arab countries such as Jordan follow many of the same patterns as in Western countries.

The article has four parts. First, I briefly describe recent progress in measuring terrorism and review what has been written on jihadist plotting in Jordan. Second, I present the dataset by discussing how the data collection and coding were conducted, as well as potential limitations and sources of inaccuracies in the material. Third, I present the main observations. Fourth, I examine if Jordan presents any specificities in terms of jihadist modus operandi.

### **Only Scratching the Surface**

The most common way to measure terrorism has been to count the number of attacks.

While numerous studies have used terrorist attacks as the dependent variable to identify causes of terrorism, there is a growing realization that this practice is problematic.<sup>7</sup> Crenshaw and LaFree, for example, stress the need for not only including launched attacks but also unsuccessful plots.<sup>8</sup> The reason is that attacks comprise only the net output of terrorist activity—or, as they put it, "the tip of the iceberg."<sup>9</sup> Although there are potential pitfalls when examining failed and foiled plots (I discuss this below), they hold that we must also include such plots in our analyses to get as precise overviews of the scale and drivers of terrorist threats as possible.

This claim is supported by a recent study by Hegghammer and Ketchley. It finds "that, while [the numbers of] plots and attacks [in a given country] are often highly correlated, they differ enough to produce statistically different results in common study designs" to identify drivers of terrorism.<sup>10</sup> If we only look at launched attacks, we, therefore, risk drawing the wrong conclusions.

While outstanding work has been done on jihadism in Jordan—particularly on the movement's history and leaders such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi<sup>11</sup>—jihadist plotting in the Kingdom is understudied. There is no comprehensive study on the topic. Worse still, there is not even an analysis of all the attacks that have taken place in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Existing literature offers only fragments of an answer to what the jihadist threat has looked like. We do not have answers to fundamental questions such as how many plots there have been, which jihadist actors have been responsible, or what type of attacks they have attempted to carry out. These answers matter because they are needed to provide empirically based explanations of what causes jihadist terrorism in Jordan. Several papers have tried to identify such causes, yet they have done so without knowing the main characteristics of the jihadist threat.<sup>13</sup> Hence, they have skipped the

first step—description—in the process of understanding the phenomenon.

These gaps and shortcomings do not appear to be unique to Jordan. Terrorist plotting has received scant attention in other relatively stable Arab countries as well. In the case of Morocco, for example, the only study we have is by Chapin.<sup>14</sup> Investigating IS-linked activity in Morocco between June 2014 and June 2017, she demonstrates the importance of including unsuccessful plots in analyses. Even though no IS-attacks occurred during these three years, the group's followers still posed a threat. According to her data, Moroccan authorities uncovered thirty-three IS-linked plots during the period.<sup>15</sup> Had she only focused on launched attacks, the study would have given a different impression of IS's role in the country.

To sum up, if we accept the proposition that we must both include attacks and unsuccessful plots when examining terrorist violence during peacetime, then we can conclude that we have so far barely scratched the surface in Jordan and other Arab countries. As the most defining feature of terrorist groups is their violent nature, this topic warrants attention if we are to further the understanding of jihadist terrorism in the region. Without more comprehensive data, we will, to some extent, continue to fumble around in the dark.

### **The Dataset**

In this section, I present the dataset and discuss the data collection and its limitations. As noted, the data used here consists of one hundred jihadist terrorist plots in Jordan. It is available in its entirety in this article's appendices: "Appendix I: A chronology of jihadist terrorist plotting in Jordan 1994-2018" and "Appendix II: A dataset of jihadist terrorist plotting in Jordan 1994-2018."

## *Definitions*

When coding the dataset, I used the following definitions. Jihadist and jihadism refer to transnational Sunni militants organizationally linked or ideologically associated with groups such as al-Qaida and IS.<sup>16</sup> I employ the terms terrorist and terrorism to describe non-state actors who use (or threaten to use) violence to instill fear in a population to further a political or religious cause.<sup>17</sup> Here, plots are defined as plans to carry out terrorist operations. They can be launched, failed, or foiled depending on their outcome.

These descriptions are relatively standard definitions of these terms that most scholars probably would accept. Still, identifying what exactly constitutes a terrorist plot is not always clear-cut. Some forms of violence are relatively straightforward. Few would have misgivings about describing shootings and bombings motivated by political and religious extremism in a country during peacetime as terrorist plots. Most would probably agree with my decision not to include jihadist prison riots and demonstrations that turn violent—such as the 2011 Zarqa-events<sup>18</sup>—in the dataset.

Yet vandalism and arson attacks are trickier to define. My solution was not to include acts of vandalism, such as when a group of adolescents smashed shisha pipes at a cafe in 2017 because they believe Islam forbids smoking.<sup>19</sup> As for arson attacks, my approach was to make case-by-case decisions. I only included incidents where the perpetrators executed the attacks to further a jihadist agenda. A case in point is when a cell of seven individuals attacked two liquor stores in Amman with Molotov cocktails on behalf of IS in 2016.<sup>20</sup>

## *Data Collection*

For each of the hundred plots, I completed a case history (see Appendix I), and I collected data on sixty-two specific factors. These factors provide information about the plotters, their ties to jihadist groups and networks, as well as how and against whom

they intended to carry out attacks (for those interested, description of each factor is available in the codebook in Appendix II).

I conducted the data collection in two steps. First, I searched for jihadist plots in Jordan in two primary databases for terrorist incidents, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the ITERATE database. They include data on terrorist attacks around the world. At the time of writing, GTD spanned from 1970 until 2018 and ITERATE from 1968 until 2017. While they provide data on thousands of terrorist incidents, they proved not to be of much help for this study. As alluded to in the introduction, GTD and ITERATE greatly underreport jihadist terrorist activity in the Kingdom. GTD includes six jihadist incidents in Jordan, and ITERATE only has four.<sup>21</sup>

Second, I searched for information about plots in open sources, reports, and academic literature, as well as leaked US government documents on *Wikileaks* and jihadist propaganda. Information about the specific sources for each case can be found in Appendix I. Put briefly, media reports as well as leaked US documents summarizing trials and verdicts of suspected jihadists were crucial for establishing basic facts about plots in the 1990s and 2000s. The works by Abu Rumman, Abu Hanieh, and Warrick were also useful for these two decades.<sup>22</sup>

For the 2010s, I mainly relied upon Arabic media, primarily the Jordanian news outlets *al-Ghad*, *Petra News Agency*, *Roya*, *Hala*, and *Jordan Times*. They provided information about plots, as well as the final verdicts of suspected jihadists and their ties to jihadist groups such as IS. The data found in these local media sources has been corroborated and supplemented with information about plots provided by regional and international news outlets—such as *al-Jazeera* and *CNN*—as well as the US State Department’s annual reports on terrorism.



The data collection produced 134 potential jihadist plots. Because the available information about thirty-four incidents was scarce, I chose to exclude these from the trend analysis. Drawing on Nesser's method of examining plots in Europe,<sup>23</sup> I divided the dataset into "well-documented plots" (n = 100) and "vague plots" (n = 34).<sup>24</sup> This classification is based on a qualitative assessment of the following criteria of documentation: 1) known jihadist perpetrator(s), 2) identified target(s), 3) identified attack method(s), and 4) concrete evidence (such as confiscated weapons). When information regarding these four elements is deemed insufficient, the plot is categorized as vague and not suitable for making generalizations. The observations presented below concerning the evolution of the jihadist threat in Jordan are only based on the hundred well-documented cases to reduce the uncertainty regarding the dataset.

I encountered some challenges when coding the cases. Particularly in the early stages of planning, plotters discuss several targets and methods. Sometimes they decide on a sophisticated plan but then change their mind after realizing that they do not possess the skills or weapons needed to execute the attack.<sup>25</sup> In such cases, I only registered the final mode(s) of operation in the dataset. However, I also included the initial, more elaborate plan in the detailed descriptions in the chronology.

Another challenge was how to code incidents such as the hotel bombings when members of al-Qaida in Iraq carried out three coordinated suicide bombings in the capital. Should it be registered as one attack or three? I chose to count the bombings as one incident because they were carried out by the same cell on the same day. I have done the same for other cases as well to be consistent.

### ***Limitations***

Datasets of this kind are bound to include inaccuracies. A case in point is that the number of plots registered should be considered a conservative estimate of jihadist

plotting in Jordan. One reason is that there tends to be a time lag between the disruption of a given plot and the release of information about the plot to the public. Information is often first disclosed during trials of suspected plotters, which can take place more than a year after their arrest. It is therefore likely that “new” plots, particularly from the period between 2013 and 2018, will emerge during upcoming trials of jihadists.

What is more, some plots are never revealed to the public if secrecy is deemed necessary by the security services.<sup>26</sup> As my dataset is based on open sources and a limited number of leaked documents,<sup>27</sup> some plots are probably missing. For example, whereas the dataset includes ten well-documented incidents from 2018, Jordan’s General Intelligence Directorate (GID) announced that it disrupted as many as thirty-two plots inside Jordan that year.<sup>28</sup> However, this figure probably includes plots that were stopped at an early phase, and that might never be characterized as “well-documented” according to my criteria of documentation. It is unlikely that many clear-cut cases are omitted.

While my overview represents a conservative estimate, there is a possibility that some of the plots I have registered as “well-documented” are based on erroneous information. For example, although I have not found evidence that Jordanian security services have spread false information, it is impossible to guarantee that none of the plots was fabricated. Jordan is not a democracy and has fewer checks on what security services can do than Western states.<sup>29</sup>

Another potential source of inaccuracy relates to specific details about given plots. Because terrorism involves secretive underground networks, sources can be uninformed, biased, or intentionally provide incomplete information. Most of the data for this paper comes from the semi-independent Jordanian media.<sup>30</sup> With regard to terrorism cases, it tends only to report information approved by the state. The press

might willingly or unwillingly exaggerate or play down the scope of plots as well as their ties to jihadist groups outside Jordan.

These issues show that there are potential pitfalls when studying plots in Jordan. While there is no bullet-proof solution to this methodological challenge, I have reduced the risk of inaccuracies by cross-checking the data whenever possible. For the same purpose, I also tracked the cases over time in the event new information emerged, as often happens during trials of suspected plotters or their appeal cases. In addition, over three years, I interviewed government officials and intelligence officers in charge of counterterrorism, as well as researchers and journalists who have been following the Jordanian jihadist movement closely since the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> Their input was particularly useful when clarifying the details of some plots.

Another step I undertook was to omit several vague incidents, as described earlier. The process of excluding vague plots is a way to avoid generalizing based on dubious information. An advantage of my conservative approach is that it makes the dataset more robust regarding the potential limitations discussed above. While not a perfect system, this reduces the uncertainty regarding the observations presented below.

## **Observations**

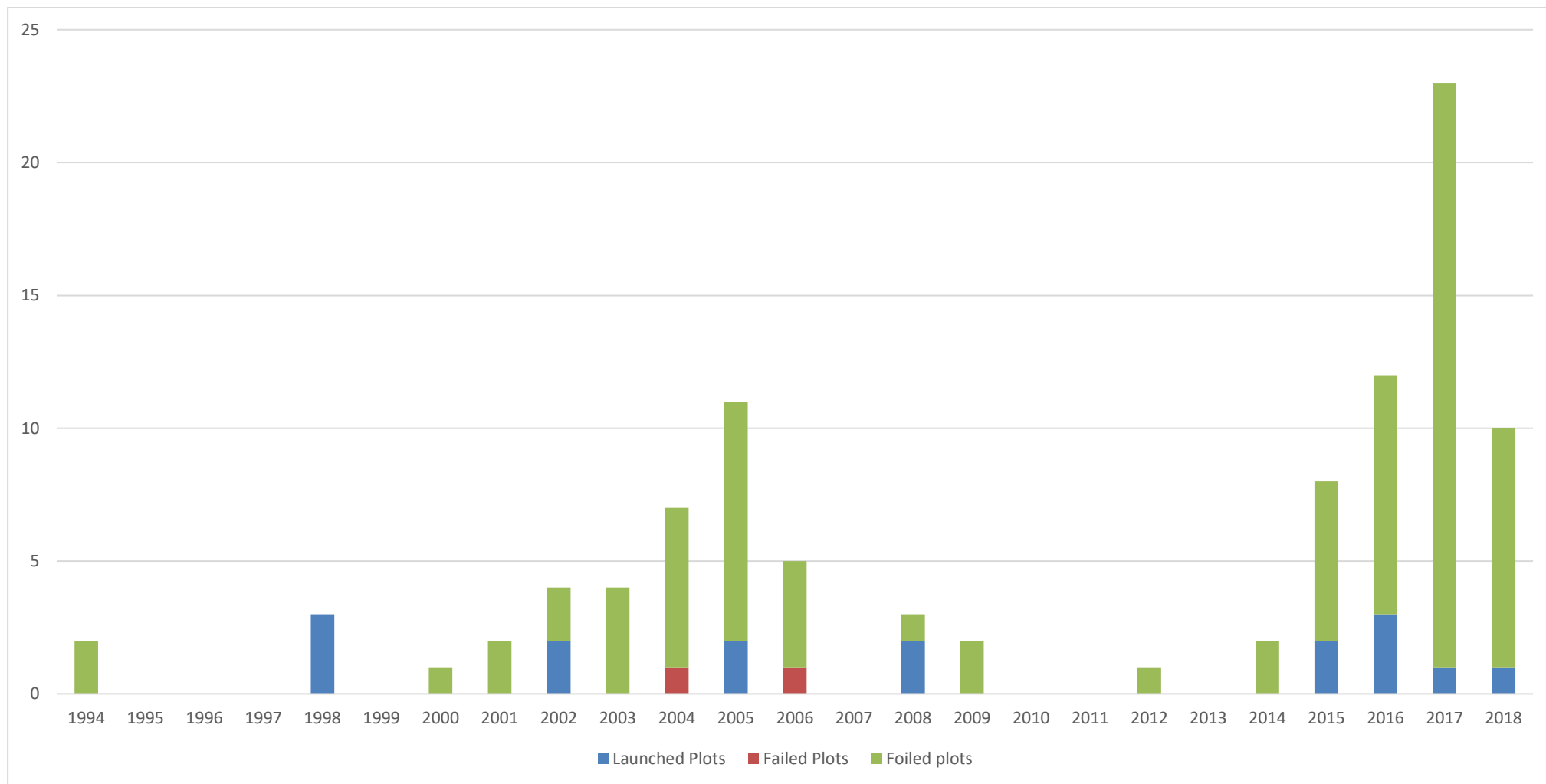
In this section, I present the observations in three steps. I start by providing an overview of plot frequency and linkages to jihadist groups before examining trends in target selection and tactics.

### ***Plot frequency and group linkages***

Among the hundred well-documented plots, Jordanian authorities foiled eighty-two, two failed because of a critical mistake by the perpetrator, while sixteen materialized into attacks.<sup>32</sup> The sixteen attacks varied in scope, from minor incidents involving Molotov

cocktails to large-scale bombings. There were two attacks with more than nine deaths: the hotel bombings and the Kerak attack in 2016 when an Islamic State (IS)-connected cell killed four police officers, three gendarmes, two Jordanian civilians, and a Canadian tourist.<sup>33</sup> However, most attacks were small-scale and caused few or no casualties. In total, I counted eighty-six fatalities (excluding perpetrators). Of these deaths, sixty were caused by the hotel bombings.

**Figure 1: Plots in Jordan 1994-2018**



If we look closer at each decade, we find significant variation in plot frequency. During some periods, attack activity was limited. Several years I have not registered any plots at all (see figure 1).

The nature of terrorist activity has also changed to some extent. The history of Jordanian jihadism can be divided into three phases based on the characteristics of the actors involved: The first phase was between the early 1990s and 1999 when groups inside Jordan represented the threat. During the second phase in the 2000s, al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) and local supporters of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi posed the most substantial threat. In the 2010s, IS and its networks of followers in Jordan dominated the threat landscape.

I registered five plots for the 1990s. Returned foreign fighters, who had participated in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, were involved in all cases. A group led by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi called *Jamā'at al-Muwahhidīn* (the Society of the Upholders of the Unity of God) was connected to the first two cases.

The group's members appear to have disagreed on which strategy to pursue within Jordan. A particularly heated topic of debate was if they should carry out attacks in the Kingdom. Some wanted to launch a terrorist campaign, whereas others questioned if it was strategically wise or even legitimate to conduct terrorist operations on Jordanian soil.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, some members were allegedly behind two foiled assassination plots against a General Intelligence Directorate (GID)-officer and a Jordanian politician, most likely in 1994.<sup>35</sup>

Then, another group known as *al-'iṣlāḥ wal-taḥaddi* (The Reform and Challenge Group) carried out three non-lethal bombings against a former security officer's car, an Israeli car, and an American school in Amman in 1998.<sup>36</sup> Still, the scale of jihadist

terrorism during this decade was nothing compared to what was to come when groups outside Jordan began plotting attacks in the Kingdom.

When Jordan foiled an al-Qaida-linked operation in late 1999 (referred to as “the Millennium plot” because it was scheduled to take place on Millennium day), it was a bad omen. The plot’s scope was more significant than all previous cases in the country. It marked the beginning of a period where the threat actors became increasingly international. Four of the plotters seem to have been to the Khalden camp<sup>37</sup> in Afghanistan to learn how to manufacture explosives. They planned to conduct two waves of attacks against tourist sites.<sup>38</sup> In 2001, Jordan foiled another plot by a cell linked to al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Reportedly, the plan was to carry out bombings against two hotels in Petra.<sup>39</sup>

However, it was the war and emergence of jihadist groups in neighboring Iraq that affected the security situation in Jordan the most in the 2000s. Hundreds of Jordanians—most notably al-Zarqawi—traveled to Iraq to fight the US-led invasion in 2003. Although al-Zarqawi had left Jordan in the late 1990s, he still had his eye on the Kingdom. His attack plans and ability to inspire others to plot terrorist operations against Jordan increased the threat level significantly. The number of plots reached a hitherto unprecedented level in 2004 and 2005 with seven and eleven well-documented plots, respectively.<sup>40</sup>

Al-Zarqawi had first gone to Afghanistan, where he established a training camp for fighters from the Levant. After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, he fled to Iraq via Iran. Following Saddam Hussein's overthrow in 2003, al-Zarqawi’s group, which eventually came to be known as al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), became the most influential jihadist faction in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi used his position as leader of AQI to send operatives to execute large-scale attacks in Jordan. These teams involved both

Jordanians and non-Jordanians. While most of their plots were foiled, they managed to carry out three attacks. The most well-known was the hotel bombings. The others were the assassination of the US diplomat Laurence Foley in 2002 and a rocket attack in Aqaba in 2005.<sup>41</sup> As a testimony of al-Zarqawi's role in increasing the threat, both the plot frequency and the level of sophistication of terrorist planning in Jordan decreased after a US airstrike killed the AQI-leader in 2006.<sup>42</sup>

The number of incidents increased once again after the outbreak of civil war in Syria and the establishment of IS in 2014. For the period between 2014 and 2018, I registered fifty-five well-documented cases. One foiled scheme in 2016 was linked to al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. It involved plans for three coordinated attacks with firearms and explosives against Jordanian security forces and tourists in downtown Amman.<sup>43</sup> Another plot against a local church in 2017 was by an individual who had wanted to join *Hay'at Tahrir al-Shām* (the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant), the former al-Qaida affiliate in Syria.<sup>44</sup> Except for these two incidents, all cases since 2014 have been linked to IS.

IS has outdone its predecessor AQI in terms of plot frequency. However, its campaign against Jordan has been more decentralized than AQI. Whereas the latter was able to send experienced operatives from Iraq to carry out attacks in the early 2000s, it seems to have been few cases in which IS-operatives have managed to travel from a conflict zone to Jordan to stage attacks in the 2010s. An exception was a plot I refer to as "the Irbid Cell" in 2016. It allegedly involved plans to bomb several targets, including a university close to the northern city of Irbid.<sup>45</sup> The cell's leader fought in Syria before returning to Jordan to form a cell and plan attacks.<sup>46</sup> Apart from the Irbid cell, IS has mainly relied on its supporters inside the Kingdom to plot attacks on its behalf.



Twenty-four of the fifty-three IS-connected cases appear to be so-called inspired plots, where there is no evidence that the culprits have communicated directly with IS. In slightly more cases, though, the local plotters have been in contact with IS-members online (twenty-nine plots – 55%). A recurrent pattern is that the IS-supporters have received instructions or assistance from IS-members in Syria or Iraq (nineteen plots – 66% of the cases where there has been contact with IS-members).

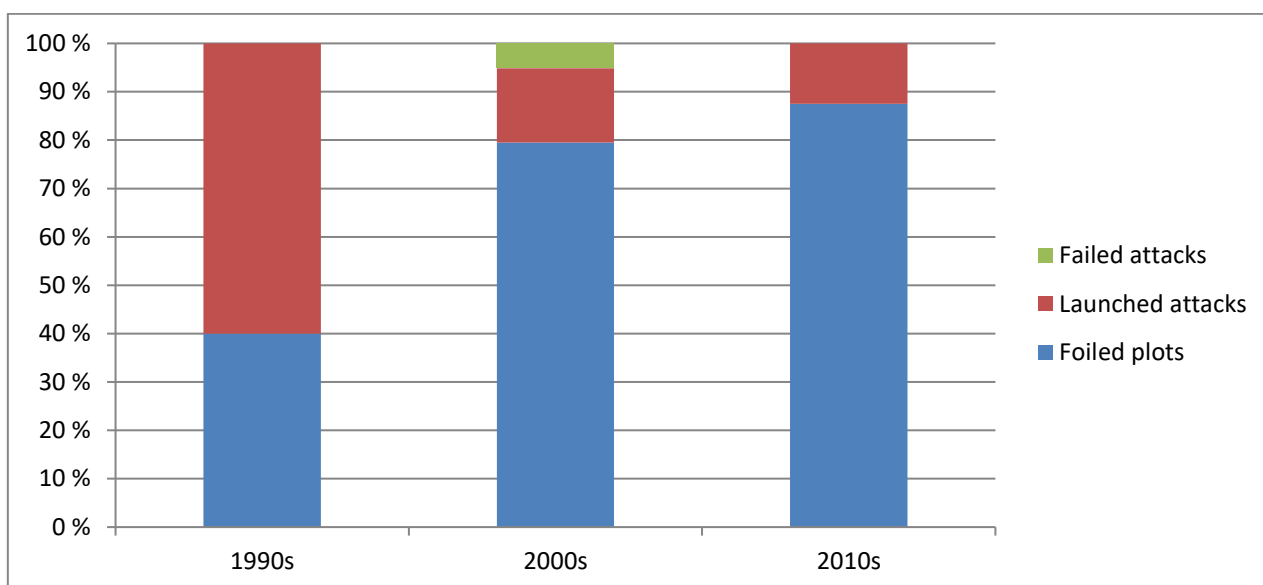
Exactly how and why the local IS-supporters came into contact with these IS-members is difficult to ascertain based on the available evidence. Some might have sought out IS-members to get approval to carry out operations in Jordan. Another pattern is that the IS-supporters initiated contact because they wanted help to travel to Syria so that they could join IS. In at least eight cases, the IS-members convinced the Jordanian IS-supporters to plot attacks in their home country instead of joining IS abroad. They advised the Jordanians on how to do so via platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

Consider the plot in 2017 involving a 24-year-old IS-supporter. In 2016, he had joined a pro-IS channel on Telegram. There he came in contact with an IS-operative going by the moniker “the State’s Terrorist.” Court documents reveal that he was instrumental in the 24-year-old’s decision to plan an attack in Jordan.<sup>47</sup> During exchanges on Telegram, the 24-year-old asked the operative to help him travel to Syria. At this point, the IS-operative started encouraging the 24-year-old to attack targets in Jordan instead. He said that such an operation would help guarantee that the 24-year-old could join IS. They agreed that he should stab a police guard outside the Ministry of Health, yet he was arrested before being able to do so.

Most plots in the 2010s were small such as this plot by the 24-year-old IS-supporter. Still, as was the case during the 2000s, some cases seem to have been large-

scale. One example was a plot uncovered in January 2018 involving seventeen IS-supporters. They reportedly intended to execute a series of attacks against a nightclub, the US embassy, a church, and Israeli businesspeople in Amman.<sup>48</sup> The number of launched attacks remained low, however, with only seven well-documented incidents recorded in the dataset.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 2: Share of launched, foiled, and failed plots per decade**



To recapitulate, the data presented in this section indicates how closely related the upticks in terrorism levels have been to regional events. If the wars in Iraq and Syria had not created safe havens from which AQI and its successor IS could instigate and inspire terror abroad, the jihadist threat to Jordan would have been less significant in the 2000s and 2010s.

### ***Target selection***

Next, I examined the targeting preferences of jihadists in Jordan. Four observations are worth emphasizing. The first basic observation is that jihadists have plotted against several types of targets. Jordanian security forces (54%) and Western citizens (39%) have been by far the most common. Some plots have also singled out the local Christian

minority<sup>50</sup> (9% of all incidents). Examples include the plan to blow up a Catholic church in Amman in 2008 and a non-lethal attack on a church and cemetery in Irbid reportedly triggered by a Christian boy's remark insulting the Prophet Muhammed that same year.<sup>51</sup> Two plots have been against public figures (2%), including a scheme to assassinate President Bush during his state visit to Jordan in November 2006.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, others have targeted what jihadists deem symbols of immorality such as liquor stores (10%).

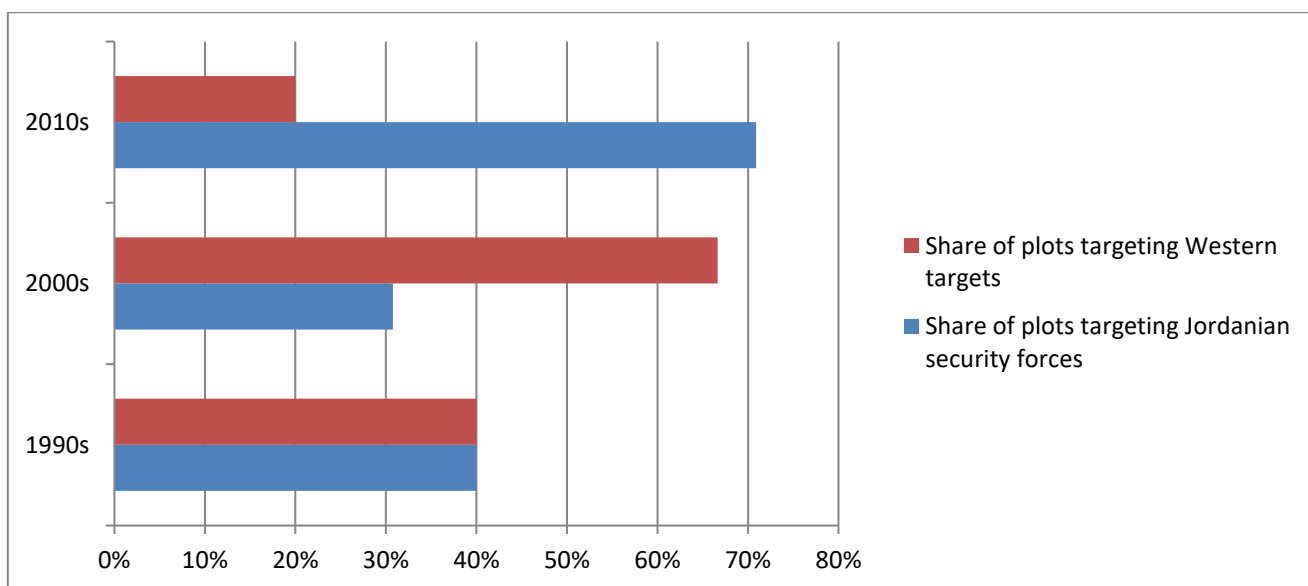
The second observation is that the trend is towards increased targeting of the security apparatus. As figure 3 shows, 71% of plots in the 2010s have targeted Jordanian security forces. Jihadists have, in particular, attempted to carry out attacks against the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) (24% of all cases). The intelligence agency has been one of the CIA's most significant partners in the so-called "war on terror." Its efforts protect and perpetuate a regime viewed by jihadists as repressive and ruling based on un-Islamic laws.<sup>53</sup> For these reasons, jihadists see GID as both their arch-enemy and the most prestigious target in Jordan.<sup>54</sup>

Some jihadists—including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—have also had personal motives for attacking GID. Both jihadists and some GID-officers emphasize that a desire for revenge has been one reason why some jihadists have singled out intelligence officers.<sup>55</sup> One example was the attempt to assassinate the former Director of the Anti-Terrorist Unit in Jordan, Ali Burjak, in 2002.<sup>56</sup> Several jihadists claim Burjak used torture during interrogations and that this was why he was targeted.<sup>57</sup>

The third observation is that the share of plots targeting Westerners—including tourists, diplomats, and military and police forces stationed in the Kingdom—has decreased substantially. That said, this decrease happened from a very high level (67% in the 2000s, see figure 3). 20% of all plots in the 2010s have continued to be against

Westerners. Not surprisingly, it is particularly Israeli and US citizens that have been singled out. While no Israelis have been killed in jihadist attacks in Jordan,<sup>58</sup> there have been several US victims. A case in point was the assassination of Laurence Foley mentioned earlier. Another was the Muwaqqar shooting in November 2015 when a Jordanian police officer killed five individuals in a green-on-blue attack (i.e., when someone attacks an ally). The victims were two US police instructors, two Jordanian interpreters, and a South African citizen.<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 3: Share of plots targeting Western targets and Jordanian security forces per decade**



The fourth observation is that indiscriminate targeting of civilians has been uncommon. This finding might seem odd, given that the most well-known terrorist attack in Jordan's history—the hotel bombings—targeted civilians. Most of the victims were guests at a Muslim wedding party at the Radisson Hotel in Amman. Yet such plots have been the exceptions rather than the rule.

Relatively few plots have involved plans to carry out bomb attacks against public areas such as hotels, coffee shops, shopping centers, and universities where

ordinary Muslim civilians most certainly would be among the victims (ten plots - 10% of all cases).<sup>60</sup> Such indiscriminate plots have become rarer since the mid-2000s. The "Irbid Cell" mentioned above is the only clear-cut example since IS declared the establishment of its so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq in June 2014. The nine attacks between 2006 and 2018 primarily targeted Jordanian security forces, Westerners, local Christians, and liquor stores.<sup>61</sup>

To sum up, my examination shows that jihadists have been very selective in what targets they choose to attack in Jordan. They increasingly go after the security apparatus. Meanwhile, they target Jordanian civilians relatively seldom. When they do, it is almost exclusively the Christian minority that is singled out. I will discuss these findings in more detail below, but before doing so, I will examine patterns in tactics and weapon preferences.

### ***Tactics***

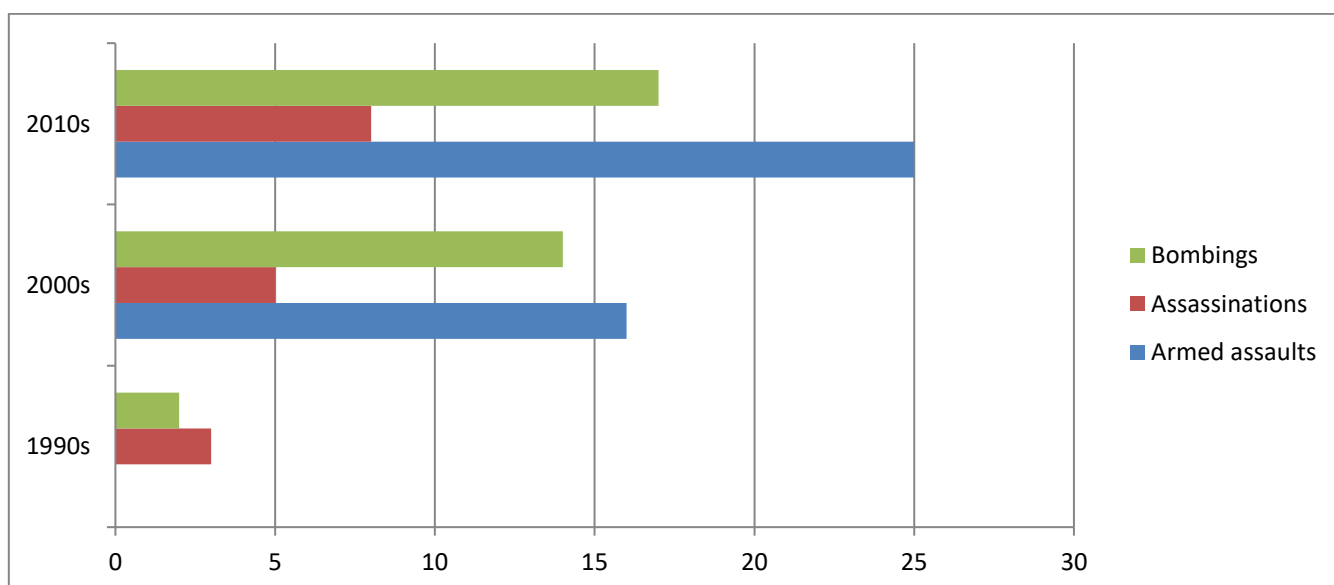
The overall observation concerning terrorist tactics is that relatively little has changed. All plots have been land-based. Armed assaults (41%), bombings (33%), and assassinations (16%) have been the most widely used (or planned) attack types by jihadists in Jordan. As figure 4 shows, there has been some variation as to which attack method has been the most common, but armed assaults have been most prevalent both in the 2000s and in the 2010s.

A few plots have involved plans for complex operations, combining different attack methods. One example was a foiled plot known as "the Second 9/11" because it was supposed to be executed in 2012 on the seventh anniversary of the hotel bombings. The plan was to carry out the attack in several phases. First, they intended to attack shopping malls and cafes to "draw the attention of security forces." Then they planned

to attack the US embassy and possibly other targets with "vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers, and mortars."<sup>62</sup>

Attempts at other attack methods have also occurred, but they have been much less common. There were six arson plots, mainly against liquor stores. Three schemes involved plans to lure security forces into ambushes.<sup>63</sup> Another four unsuccessful cases involved hostage-taking. These cases were similar in the sense that the culprits did not plan to demand a ransom but intended to kill the hostages. In two cases, sources mention that they were planning to film the executions.<sup>64</sup>

**Figure 4: Number of plots involving bombings, assassinations and armed assaults per decade**

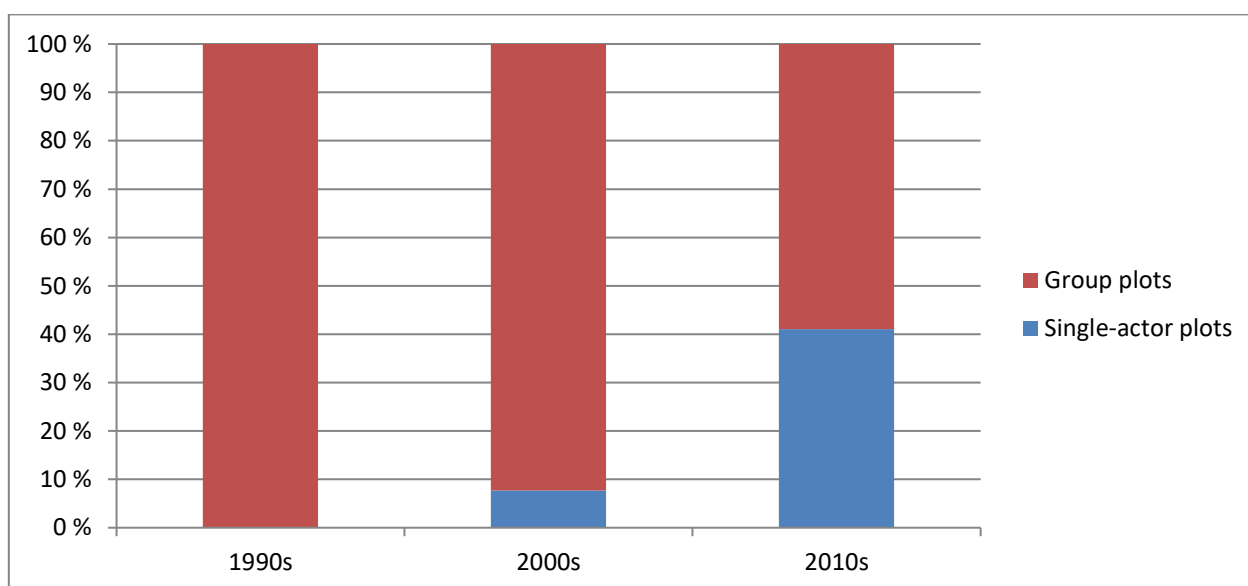


The most striking development is that there has been a trend towards more single-actor terrorism (although group plots continue to be most common). As figure 5 demonstrates, there were almost no such plots between 1994 and 2009.

Few of the single-actors in Jordan can be regarded as so-called "lone wolves" who become radicalized and plan attacks entirely on their own. Most appear to have been part of larger jihadist networks. In several cases, there is evidence that others have

been involved in the planning of attacks. A case in point is the already mentioned plot in 2017 involving the 24-year-old IS-supporter. Another was a foiled plot in 2016, where an individual who had joined IS in Syria appears to have convinced a person in Jordan to plan an armed assault against Christians and "apostate" Muslims. The IS-member also promised that the organization would provide funds for purchasing the weapon.<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 5: Share of group plots versus single-actor plots per decade**



As for weapon preferences, firearms (51%) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (46%) have been the weapons of choice. Some plans have involved other weapon types such as Molotov cocktails (7%) and melee weapons, including knives and other blunt objects (5%). It should be mentioned that all the plots involving melee weapons have occurred after 2016, so increased use of knives could be an emerging trend. However, the number of such plots continue to be low in comparison with firearms and IEDs.

There have been few attempts to employ other means of attacks. Four plots have involved rockets or mortars. Only one of these materialized into an attack (the rocket attack by al-Qaida in Iraq in 2005). There is only one known example of a drone plot.

The IS-connected cell responsible for the IED-attack on a gendarmerie vehicle close to the predominately Christian city of Fuheis in August 2018 planned additional operations, which reportedly included a plot to use a drone to bomb military installations in the Kingdom.<sup>66</sup>

When it comes to chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear agents (CBRN), there is only one serious case in the dataset: the Amman chemical bomb plot in 2004.<sup>67</sup> The details of this plot are disputed. It was reportedly orchestrated by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his lieutenant Azmi al-Jayyousi. Their aim was to strike GID's headquarters, the Jordanian prime minister's office, and the US embassy with vehicle-borne chemical bomb attacks. The blasts were allegedly intended to be huge. After his capture, al-Jayyousi said on Jordanian state television that they could have caused as many as 80,000 deaths, which appears highly unlikely.<sup>68</sup> The cell had allegedly prepared 20 tons of "bombs intended to spread toxic gas." Jordanian officials claimed the large quantity of sulfuric acid would have caused a deadly "toxic cloud."<sup>69</sup> US officials commenting on the plot's damage potential were more cautious in their assessment. They explained that sulfuric acid is commonly used to "increase the size of conventional explosions," rather than dispersing chemical agents. They agreed, however, that the plot would have resulted in a significant number of casualties if it had materialized.<sup>70</sup>

To recapitulate, the above suggests that little has changed in the way jihadists attempt to conduct attacks in Jordan. The most significant differences are that the networks responsible for terrorist plotting in the Kingdom have become more autonomous from jihadist groups abroad and that single-actor terrorism has increased. The question now is if Jordan presents any specificities in terms of jihadist modus operandi.



## **Comparative Observations and Possible Explanations**

In this section, I begin by discussing tactics before looking at targeting behavior. My overall observation concerning jihadist tactics in Jordan is that they largely conform to what we observe in other regions, such as the West.

Several scholars have noted that most terrorists are operationally conservative.<sup>71</sup> They tend to stick to methods that have been effective elsewhere. This observation applies to a large extent to jihadists in Jordan as well. As noted, few changes have occurred. Armed assaults with firearms and bombings have been the most common attack types. The same pattern is present worldwide.<sup>72</sup> In general, firearms and explosives have been the terrorist's weapons of choice ever since Alfred Nobel invented dynamite in 1867.<sup>73</sup>

Despite concerns that jihadists would employ weapons of mass destruction, particularly after the 9/11 attacks, hardly any plots in Jordan have involved CBRN agents or other sophisticated weapons. There is not comparable data about terrorist plots in other Arab countries, but there are datasets about jihadist plotting in the West. The same observations appear to be true there. Similarly, there have been few CBRN plots in the West, and most have been small-scale.<sup>74</sup> The Jordanian case confirms claims that, for all the hype, there has not been a shift towards more technologically advanced modes of operation in urban terrorism (although terrorists have made good use of new communication technologies such as end-to-end encryption).<sup>75</sup>

If anything, there has been a change towards somewhat simpler methods and tactics. The networks responsible for terrorist plotting have become increasingly autonomous from the mother organization, giving local plotters more operational freedom. Like others have observed about jihadists in the West, their counterparts in Jordan have increasingly resorted to single-actor terrorism.<sup>76</sup>

There are at least two explanations for this shift to greater autonomy and more single-actor terrorism. The first is that it is an adaptation to more effective counter-terrorism measures. As governments have become more adept at tackling the jihadist threat, it has become more difficult for terrorist cells to avoid detection. Jihadist strategists such as Abu Musab al-Suri have promoted single-actor terrorism in their writings because it is more challenging for authorities to uncover.<sup>77</sup> Groups such as al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and IS have focused on single-actor terrorism and provided would-be solo-jihadists with information on conducting different types of operations in magazines such as *Inspire and Rumiya*.<sup>78</sup> IS has tasked individuals with instructing single-actors via messaging apps such as Telegram to carry out operations.

Finally, a more general explanation is the phenomenon known as the contagion effect. Like copycat killers, terrorists have been found to emulate one another.<sup>79</sup> As more solo attacks have occurred worldwide, the focus on single-actor terrorism has increased both in the mainstream media and on social media platforms, resulting in an ominous cycle where new incidents inspire more individuals to carry out solo operations.

However, a difference is that the tactical adaptation has gone further in Western countries than in Jordan. In the West, jihadists have increasingly employed simple weapons that require little training or preparation such as knives and vehicles (in ramming attacks) to make it harder for security services to thwart plots.<sup>80</sup> In Jordan, the jihadists have mainly stuck to firearms and explosives, although plans involving melee weapons could be an emerging trend, as described earlier.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this difference in weapon usage in detail. Yet, one reason why more than half of the plots in Jordan involve firearms could be that this type of weapon is readily available in the country. This situation might

change in the future, though, as the Jordanian government is currently conducting a crackdown on unlicensed firearms.<sup>81</sup> As for why we have not seen vehicles used in ramming attacks, the reason might be tied to targeting preferences. Such attacks usually target pedestrians indiscriminately. Jihadists have wanted to avoid indiscriminate attacks in Jordan.

When it comes to targeting behavior, there are both similarities and differences between Jordan and Western countries. On the one hand, jihadists appear to select many of the same types of targets in both contexts. Although there is some variation between Western countries, the plots have mainly been directed against security forces, ordinary Western citizens, Christians, and symbols of immorality.<sup>82</sup> As in Jordan, they seemingly try to avoid targeting ordinary Sunni Muslims partly because doing so would risk alienating potential supporters and recruits.<sup>83</sup>

In the Jordanian context, the specification that whom they avoid targeting are ordinary Muslims is critical because most of the security forces also are Sunni. Yet, as the literature on jihadist ideology and targeting shows, the security forces are still considered legitimate targets because they serve an "apostate regime."<sup>84</sup> Since 2014, IS has increasingly called for attacks against the security apparatus to avenge Jordan's airstrikes on the caliphate.<sup>85</sup> These calls could be one reason why an increasing share of plots in the Kingdom has been against the security forces.

The targeting preferences mean that jihadists must be more careful when selecting targets in Jordan than in the West. The reason is simple: while the majority of people in the West are legitimate targets, only a minority can be targeted in Jordan because most Jordanians are Sunnis. As a result, plots against public areas aimed at killing random civilians have been frequent in Western Europe, for example, while they have been rare in Jordan.<sup>86</sup>

Anecdotal evidence from countries such as Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia indicates that jihadists primarily target security forces, Westerners (or symbols of Western influence), and religious minorities in these countries as well.<sup>87</sup> Although jihadists have employed excessive violence against Sunnis, this appears to be mainly limited to groups trying to enforce their control over local populations in the context of civil wars, such as the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria and IS in Syria and Iraq.<sup>88</sup> Hence, it seems probable that the targeting behavior observed in Jordan is similar in other Arab countries, where jihadists have to operate clandestinely. However, this is a hypothesis that must be tested further.

## **Conclusion**

The literature on jihadism has yet to explain what type of threat jihadists pose to Jordan. In this article, I set out to explore the evolution of the jihadist threat by presenting a new dataset about jihadist plots in the country. To my knowledge, this paper is the first study of a non-Western country to do so by examining launched, foiled, and failed terrorist plots systematically.

While most existing studies only examine launched attacks,<sup>89</sup> my findings show the merit of studying foiled and failed plots as well. I found eighty-two foiled plots, two failed plots, and sixteen launched attacks between 1994 and 2018. The high number of foiled plots shows that one is exposed to significant misrepresentation if launched attacks are the sole measurement of terrorist activity.

My data shows that the threat to Jordan has consisted mainly of plans to carry out armed assaults and bomb attacks against the Jordanian security apparatus and Westerners. Like the general observation elsewhere, Jordanian jihadists have been operationally conservative.

One of the few significant changes that have occurred is that the networks responsible for terrorist plotting in the country have become increasingly autonomous from the mother organization. While al-Qaida in Iraq managed to send trained operatives to carry out attacks in Jordan in the 2000s, IS has mainly had to rely upon jihadists based inside the Kingdom to act on its behalf in the 2010s. Another change is that the jihadists have increasingly attempted to carry out attacks on their own, although group plots continue to outnumber single-actor plots in absolute numbers.

As discussed, the same tactical trends are seen in the West. Trends in jihadist tactics in other relatively stable Arab countries such as Morocco and Saudi Arabia might also follow similar patterns as in other contexts where jihadists must operate clandestinely. However, more work needs to be done before definitive conclusions can be drawn. A necessary first step is to collect and examine data on jihadist plots in these countries, as I have done here for Jordan. Doing so would also address the dire need for better data on terrorism in Arab countries. If we obtain more comprehensive data, it will also be possible to probe the phenomenon's causes and drivers in a more scientific manner.

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<sup>1</sup> The attack could have been worse as the woman failed to detonate her bomb. For more, see Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Doubleday, 2015), 193-205.

<sup>2</sup> [Reference anonymized for review].

<sup>3</sup> Talking Terror (Season 1 Episode 19, 2018). *John Horgan: The Psychology of Terrorism*. <https://soundcloud.com/user-366747443/john-horgan>. Talking Terror is a podcast by John F. Morrison.

<sup>4</sup> For more, see Thomas Hegghammer and Neil Ketchley, "Measuring Terrorism," *SocArXiv* (2020).

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- <sup>5</sup> In this article, a threat refers to the risk or potential for attacks to occur. It is determined by the jihadists' intentions, capabilities, motivation, and willingness to carry out particular forms of attacks.
- <sup>6</sup> Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 3-24; Clare Ellis, "With a little help from my friends: an exploration of the tactical use of single-actor terrorism by the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 41-47; "A Homegrown Threat: Islamist Extremist Plots in the United States" (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2018).
- <sup>7</sup> Hegghammer and Ketchley, "Measuring Terrorism."
- <sup>8</sup> Martha Crenshaw and Gary Lafree, *Countering Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2017), 69-98.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.
- <sup>10</sup> Hegghammer and Ketchley, "Measuring Terrorism": 1.
- <sup>11</sup> See Anouar Boukhars, "The challenge of terrorism and religious extremism in Jordan." *Strategic insights* 5, no. 4 (2006); Steven Brooke, "The preacher and the jihadi," *Current trends in Islamist ideology* 3 (2006): 52-66; Nelly Lahoud, "In Search of Philosopher-Jihadis: Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's Jihadi Philosophy," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 2 (2009): 205-220; Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Kirk Sowell, "Jordanian Salafism and the Jihad in Syria," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 18 (2015): 41-71; Sean Yom and Katrina Sammour, "Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalization in Jordan: Social and Political Dimensions," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 4 (2017): 25-30.
- <sup>12</sup> An exception is al-Shishani's work. Examining jihadist plotting in the late 2000s, he shows al-Zarqawi's influence in Jordan continued well after his death in 2006. Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan," *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 34 (2009): 4-6. Still, most of what we know is from works that have focused on other topics. For example, Abu Rumman, Abu Hanieh, and Warrick provide insights into some high-

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profile attacks including the hotel bombings in their books. See Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, “*Al-Salafiyya al-Jihādiyya*” *fī al-’urdunn ba’d maqtal al-Zarqāwiyy: Muqārabat al-huwiyya, ’azmat al-qiyāda wa-dabābiyyat al-ru’ya* [“Jihadist Salafism” in Jordan after the Killing of al-Zarqawi: Identity, Crisis of Leadership, and Blurred Vision] (Jordan: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2009); Warrick, *Black Flags*, 193-205.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Erica Harper, “Examining Psychological Drivers of Radicalisation in Jordan” (West Asia-North Africa Institute, May 2017): 1–34; Anne Speckhard, “the Jihad in Jordan: Drivers of Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Jordan” (International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, March 25, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Chapin, “Beyond the Caliphate: Islamic State Activity outside the Group’s Defined Wilayat–Morocco” (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2018): 1-7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*: 1.

<sup>16</sup> Jihadists wage a global armed struggle to topple regimes in the Muslim world. Their ultimate aim is the re-establishment of the caliphate and the application of Islamic law. For more, see Anne Stenersen “Jihadism after the ‘Caliphate’: towards a new typology,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2018): 1-20.

<sup>17</sup> For more on definitions, see Alex P. Schmid, “The Definition of Terrorism,” in Alex P. Schmid, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 39–98.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the Zarqa-events, consult Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Jordan’s New Generation of Salafi-Jihadists Take to the Streets to Demand Rule by Shari’a,” *Terrorism Monitor* 9, No. 18 (2011).

<sup>19</sup> “10 sanawāt ’ashghāl mu’aqqata li-’ustādh ’urdunniyy jannada ṭalabat madrasa bi-khaliyya ’irhābiyya” [10 years of temporary labor to a Jordanian teacher who recruited school students to terrorist cell], *Roya*, April 15, 2019, <https://royanews.tv/news/179799>.

<sup>20</sup> “Al-ḥukm bil-’i’dām wal-’ashghāl mā bayna 10 ilā 15 sana bi-ḥaqq muttāhimīn bil-intimā’ li-Dā’ish” [Death Sentence and Labor from 10 to 15 Years for Individuals Suspected of Belonging to Daish], *Roya*, May 14, 2018, <http://royanews.tv/news/154982>.

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<sup>21</sup> Five steps need to be conducted to replicate these figures. First, I downloaded all incidents for Jordan in both databases. I found 117 attacks in GTD and 118 in ITERATE. Second, I excluded all cases which were not motivated by a religious cause. This was done based on which groups were coded as responsible for the attacks in the respective database. This deletion left 22 incidents in GTD and 14 in ITERATE. Third, I excluded all attacks not carried out by jihadists. This category of omission includes attacks by actors such as Muhammad's Army, which have Islamist leanings but are not jihadists. This left 12 incidents in GTD and four in ITERATE. Fourth, I aggregated all attacks which were carried out by the same cell on the same day. For example, while GTD registered the Amman hotel bombings as three attacks, I only count these bombings as one incident. This step left eight attacks in GTD and four in ITERATE. Fifth, I deleted all attacks against Jordanian border guards from Syrian territory, such as the IS-suicide bombing in June 2016. This last step left six incidents in GTD and four in ITERATE. The data can be found here: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> and <https://library.duke.edu/data/sources/iterate>.

<sup>22</sup> Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, "*Al-Salafiyya al-Jihādiyya*"; Warrick, *Black Flags*.

<sup>23</sup> Petter Nesser, *Islamist terrorism in Europe: A history* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Descriptions of the vague plots can be found in Appendix I.

<sup>25</sup> The case I refer to as "Plot by al-Qaida to launch an attack in Amman" in 2016 is one example where the plan changed, see Appendix I.

<sup>26</sup> This was explained to the author during interviews with Jordanian officials in Amman in January 2019.

<sup>27</sup> The number of leaked documents used here is twenty, see Appendix I.

<sup>28</sup> Fares Braizat, "Unknown knights: Countering terrorism with conviction," *Jordan Times*, March 23, 2019, <https://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/fares-braizat/unknown-knights-countering-terrorism-conviction>.

<sup>29</sup> According to POLITY, Jordan is a closed anocracy. For more, see "Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946-2013," <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.



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- <sup>30</sup> According to the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, the media in Jordan is “closely watched.” For more, see <https://rsf.org/en/jordan>.
- <sup>31</sup> Author’s interviews, Amman, October 2017, August 2018 and January 2019.
- <sup>32</sup> Besides these sixteen attacks, there have been other incidents connected to Islamist extremists in Jordan. One example was the assassination of a retired GID-officer in 2018. However, these incidents have been categorized as “vague plots” because I have not found clear-cut evidence that the perpetrators were jihadists. For more, see Appendix I.
- <sup>33</sup> For a detailed description of these attacks, see Appendix I.
- <sup>34</sup> Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, “*Al-Salafiyya al-Jihādiyya*”, 20.
- <sup>35</sup> The group is often incorrectly referred to as *Bay’at al-Imam*. Its activities have been the subject of debate. For more, see Joas Wagemakers. “A Terrorist Organization that Never Was: The Jordanian “Bay’at al-Imam” Group,” *Middle East Journal* 68, no. 1 (2014): 59–75.
- <sup>36</sup> See Appendix I.
- <sup>37</sup> How the Khalden camp was connected to al-Qaida is a subject of debate. As Stenersen observes, the camp is often described as an “al-Qaida camp.” However, she finds little evidence that the organization financed the training camp in her book. See Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaida in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 50-51.
- <sup>38</sup> The cell in Jordan was one of several al-Qaida-linked plots worldwide to coincide with the millennium celebrations. Other targets included Los Angeles International Airport, Indian Airlines Flight 814 and a US warship at the coast of Yemen. For more, see Appendix I.
- <sup>39</sup> “Jordanian intelligence helped thwart attacks, sources say,” *CNN*, November 19, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/11/19/inv.jordan.intelligence/>.
- <sup>40</sup> The actual number of plots might be higher. In 2004, King Abdullah II reportedly said that Jordan was “picking up terrorist groups [at a rate of] one every two weeks.” Quoted in Andrew W. Terill, “Jordanian National Security and the Future of Middle East Stability” (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2008): 1.
- <sup>41</sup> See Appendix I.

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- <sup>42</sup> “How Jordanians hunted down their hated son,” *Guardian*, June 11, 2006,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/11/alqaida.iraq1>.
- <sup>43</sup> “Three Sentenced to Life for Plotting Terror Attacks,” *Jordan Times*, April 12, 2017,  
<http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/three-sentenced-life-plotting-terror-attacks>.
- <sup>44</sup> “‘aḥkām mushaddida bi-ḥaqq 33 muttahiman bil-’irhāb” [Severe Sentences for 33 Accused of Terrorism], *Khaberni*, July 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2klEBFW>.
- <sup>45</sup> Speckhard, “the Jihad in Jordan”: 19.
- <sup>46</sup> Another possible exception is the plot I refer to as “Terrorist plot by Yemeni IS-member”, see Appendix I.
- <sup>47</sup> “Al-mukhābarāt tufshil mukhaṭṭaṭāt ’irhābiyya istahdafat al-’urdunn” [The Intelligence Services Thwart Terrorist Plots Targeting Jordan], *Sawaleif*, July 17, 2017,  
<https://bit.ly/2KNgmHG>.
- <sup>48</sup> “Defendants in Major Terror Trial Plead Not Guilty,” *Jordan Times*, April 2, 2018,  
<http://jordantimes.com/news/local/defendants-major-terror-trial-plead-not-guilty>.
- <sup>49</sup> [Reference anonymized for review]
- <sup>50</sup> The exact share of Christians in Jordan is unknown. Estimates vary between 3% and 6%. For more, see “Guide: Christians in the Middle East,” *BBC*, October 11, 2011,  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15239529>. The remaining population is almost exclusively Sunni-Muslim.
- <sup>51</sup> “Al-sijn 22 ‘āman lil-’irhābiyyīn ḥāwalū tafjīr kanīsa bi-Mārkā” [22 Years in Prison to the Terrorists who Attempted to Blow up a Church in Marka], *Assawsana*, March 16, 2009,  
<https://www.assawsana.com/portal/pages.php?newsid=11134>; al-Shishani, “Neo-Zarqawists Target the Arab Christians of Jordan.”
- <sup>52</sup> “Jordanians Accused of Plot to Kill Bush,” *Mail & Guardian*, March 7, 2007,  
<https://mg.co.za/article/2007-03-07-jordanians-accused-of-plot-to-kill-bush>.
- <sup>53</sup> For more on the ideological background of jihadist groups, see Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi*.

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- <sup>54</sup> There are several examples of jihadists threatening the Jordanian intelligence service. See, e.g., “Al-Furqān Media presents a new video message from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shām: "He Named You Muslims",” *Jihadology*, April 13, 2014, <https://jihadology.net/2014/04/13/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-the-muslims-he-hears-you/>.
- <sup>55</sup> Speckhard, “the Jihad in Jordan”: 50.
- <sup>56</sup> The plot did not kill Burjak, but two passersby were killed. “Maḥkamat ’amn al-dawla al-’urdunniyya tanzur fī qaḍiyyat muḥāwalat iḡtiyāl ra’īs shu’bat mukāfaḡat al-’irhāb bil-mukhābarāt” [The Jordanian State Security Court looks into the case of the attempted assassination of the leader of the anti-terrorist unit in the intelligence service], *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 2, 2002, <https://bit.ly/2mnqksR>.
- <sup>57</sup> Speckhard, “the Jihad in Jordan”: 50.
- <sup>58</sup> Israelis have been wounded in attacks in Jordan, such as the assaults on the Israeli embassy employees in Amman in late 2000. However, the perpetrators appear not to have been jihadists. For more, see “Israeli Shot, Wounded in Jordan,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 5, 2000, <https://www.jta.org/2000/12/05/news-opinion/israeli-shot-wounded-in-jordan>.
- <sup>59</sup> “At least five killed by Jordanian police officer in training centre shooting,” *The Guardian*, November 9, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/09/two-americans-killed-at-police-training-centre-in-jordan>.
- <sup>60</sup> A cautionary note is needed here. It was challenging to decide which cases to code as indiscriminate plots against public spaces. The reason is that there sometimes is a discrepancy between what jihadists claim was the purpose of an attack and what actually happened. I have not found any plot where there is clear-cut evidence that the primary intention was to target ordinary Muslims. A telling example is that al-Zarqawi claimed that even AQI’s hotel bombings were not aimed at Jordanian civilians. “Voice on tape: Jordanians not targeted,” *CNN*, November 19, 2005, <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/11/18/zarqawi.jordan/>. However,

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notwithstanding his claim, the outcome was that many ordinary Muslim civilians were killed. I chose to code plots that were similar to the hotel bombings (i.e., plans to carry out bomb attacks against hotels, airport terminals, hospitals, and so forth) as indiscriminate plots against public spaces.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix I and II for more information.

<sup>62</sup> “Country Reports on Terrorism 2012” (U.S. State Department, May 2013): 125.

<sup>63</sup> This includes the plots I refer to as the “Breizat cell” in 2005, “IS-connected family plot in Ma’an” in 2015, and “IS-plot to ambush police officers” in 2017. See Appendix I.

<sup>64</sup> “15 sana li-muttahimayn khaṭṭaṭā li-khaṭf wa-qatl ’aḥad ḍubbāt al-mukhābarāt” [15 years to two suspects who planned to kidnap and kill a GID-officer], *Hala*, February 20, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2EIJgg>; “’urdunniyy bi-khaliyya dā’ishiyya khaṭṭaṭa li-khaṭf wa-qatl shaqīq lahu min murattabāt al-Darak” [Jordanian in an IS-cell planned to kidnap and kill his brother in the Gendarmerie], *Roya*, December 30, 2019, <https://royanews.tv/news/201275>.

<sup>65</sup> “Maḥkamat ’amn al-dawla taḥkum bil-’ashghāl al-shāqqa ’alā ’irhābiyyīn min al-mu’ayyidīn li-Dā’ish” [The State Security Court Sentences IS-supporters to Hard Labor] (Jordan TV, 1 March 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiRCsTJbDLM>.

<sup>66</sup> “Salt Suspects confess to greater terror schemes,” *Jordan Times*, September 14, 2018, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/salt-suspects-confess-greater-terror-schemes>.

<sup>67</sup> In 2005, another cell referred to as the Khattab brigade considered spraying cyanide on some nightclubs’ doorknobs to poison their customers. Yet the suspects were unable to acquire the necessary chemicals. They, therefore, opted for an armed assault with firearms instead. “Terrorism Trials Update,” October 5, 2006, [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06AMMAN7630\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06AMMAN7630_a.html).

<sup>68</sup> Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, “*Al-Salafiyya al-Jihādiyya*”, 35-36.

<sup>69</sup> “Jordan Says Major Al Qaeda Plot Disrupted,” *CNN*, April 26, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/04/26/jordan.terror/>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. For more about the plot, see Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaida's Quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction: The History behind the Hype* (VDM Publishing, 2008).

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- <sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Bruce Hoffman, “Terrorist Targeting: Tactics, Trends, and Potentialities,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 2 (1993): 12-29; Adam Dolnik, *Understanding Terrorist Innovation: Technology, tactics and global trends* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 10-11; Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 35.
- <sup>72</sup> For more on the pattern worldwide, see Gary LaFree, “The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) Accomplishments and Challenges,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4, no. 1 (2010): 37-38; Martha Crenshaw, Erik Dahl, and Margaret A. Wilson, “Comparing Failed, Foiled, Completed and Successful Terrorist Attacks: Year 5 Final Report” (College Park, MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2017): 15.
- <sup>73</sup> Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): 382.
- <sup>74</sup> Nesser et al., “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe” 11; Crenshaw et al., “Comparing Failed, Foiled, Completed and Successful Terrorist Attacks.”
- <sup>75</sup> See Adam Dolnik, “The Dynamics of Terrorist Innovation,” in Magnus Ranstorp and Magnus Normark, eds., *Understanding Terrorism Innovation and Learning* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 76-95; Truls H. Tønnessen, “Islamic State and Technology: A Literature Review,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 6 (2017): 101-111.
- <sup>76</sup> See Nesser et al. “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe”; Ellis, “With a little help from my friends;” “A Homegrown Threat: Islamist Extremist Plots in the United States:” 1.
- <sup>77</sup> Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab Al-Suri* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), 6.
- <sup>78</sup> Alastair G. Reed and Haroro J. Ingram, “Exploring the Role of Instructional Material in AQAP's Inspire and ISIS' Rumiyyah” (The Hague: Europol, 2017): 1-17.
- <sup>79</sup> Brigitte L. Nacos, “Revisiting the Contagion Hypothesis: Terrorism, News Coverage, and Copycat Attacks,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3, no. 3 (2009): 3–13.
- <sup>80</sup> Nesser et al., “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe.”

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- <sup>81</sup> “Crackdown on unlicensed weapons continues,” *Jordan Times*, September 11, 2019, <https://jordantimes.com/news/local/crackdown-unlicensed-weapons-continues>.
- <sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Cato Hemmingby, “Exploring the Continuum of Lethality: Militant Islamists' Targeting Preferences in Europe,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 5 (2017): 25-41; Martha Crenshaw, Erik Dahl, and Margaret Wilson, "Jihadist Terrorist Plots in the United States" (College Park, MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2017): 1-4.
- <sup>83</sup> Such alienation did, in fact, occur after the hotel bombings. This attack caused significant damage to the jihadists' standing in Jordan. Opinion polls by Pew Research Center show the level of support for al-Qaida's former leader Osama bin Laden dropped from over 60 percent in 2005 to approximately 20 percent in 2006. For more, see “Declining Support for bin Laden and Suicide Bombing,” Pew Research Center, September 10, 2009.
- <sup>84</sup> See, e.g., Stenersen “Jihadism after the ‘Caliphate’.”
- <sup>85</sup> For examples, see “Al-’ashghāl 10 sanawāt li-7 muttahirīm khattātū li-tanfīdh ‘amaliyyāt ‘irhābiyya fī al-’urdunn” [Labor 10 Years for 7 Individuals Accused of Planning to carry out Terrorist Operations in Jordan], *Philadelphia News*, June 27, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2N9jfVe>; “New video message from The Islamic State: "Alert When There Is Danger – Wilāyat al-Furāt",” *Jihadology*, April 5, 2017, <https://jihadology.net/2017/04/05/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-alert-when-there-is-danger-wilayat-al-furat/>.
- <sup>86</sup> Nesser et al., “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe;” Hemmingby, “Exploring the Continuum of Lethality.”
- <sup>87</sup> See, e.g., Michael Horton, “Crossing the Canal: Why Egypt Faces a Creeping Insurgency,” *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 6 (2017): 22-28; Rogelio Alonso and Marcos García Rey, “The Evolution of Jihadist Terrorism in Morocco,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 4 (2007): 571-592; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng, “Tunisian Jihadism after the Sousse Massacre,” *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 10 (2015): 13-18.
- <sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Mohammad M. Hafez, "Armed Islamist movements and political violence in Algeria," *The Middle East Journal* 54, no. 4 (2000): 572-591; Nils Petter Gleditsch and Ida

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<sup>89</sup> [Reference anonymized for review]