

Canadian
Forces
College

Collège
des
Forces
Canadiennes



ROYAL JORDANIAN AIR FORCE SHIELD AND HANDS OF STEEL

Major Ata Alsarayeh

JCSP 46

Service Paper

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2020.

PCEMI 46

Étude militaire

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2020.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 46 – PCEMI 46
2019 – 2020

SERVICE PAPER - ÉTUDE MILITAIRE

**ROYAL JORDANIAN AIR FORCE
SHIELD AND HANDS OF STEEL**

Major Ata Alsarayreh

"This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfillment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is an academic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defense. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defense."

Word Count: 2280

“La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale.”

Nombre de mots: 2280

ROYAL JORDANIAN AIRFORCE SHIELD AND HANDS OF STEEL

AIM

1. Most people consider Jordan a hub of peace and stability in an otherwise violence-ridden region. Nonetheless, recent terrorist activities in the area threaten to affect livelihoods and disrupt peaceful coexistence within the kingdom. The primary purpose of maintaining an army is to protect a country's citizens from both internal and external attacks. Therefore, we need to understand the effectiveness of the Jordanian Air Force in containing terrorism to determine the peacefulness of the country. This paper aims at identifying the strength and flaws of the Jordanian Air Force in fighting terror and providing sustainable recommendations for better protection in line with the operation on ISIS.

INTRODUCTION

2. Jordan is geographically situated in the center of the Middle East, thereby making it a globally strategic state for launching counter-terrorism activities. The central location within the Middle East is the main reason Jordan maintains a strong-armed forces. Jordan also receives support from the international community in order to bolster the fight against violent extremist organizations. Further, the political leadership, as well as Jordanian citizens, have made a significant step in combatting terror in the area.

3. The Royal Jordanian Air Force is a division of the Jordanian Armed Forces. The Jordanian Air Force has around twelve thousand active members and approximately 100 different types of attack aircraft. Some of the remarkable missions that the Jordanian Air Force has engaged in the recent past include their involvement in the Syrian civil war. The Jordanian fighter aircrafts destroyed numerous targets and vehicles to prevent them from infiltrating the Syrian border into Jordan. Operation inherent resolve, which they did in combination with the United States forces against ISIS. The primary role of this unit is aerial warfare. As such, they provide air support for their land counterparts.

DISCUSSION

Jordanian Airforce Roles, Missions, and Tasks

4. The primary roles of the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF) are air defense, performing airlift operations, conducting surveillance, and search and rescue operations. Operationally, the RJAF has undertaken numerous successful missions. For example, according to the Jordanian armed forces strategic planning, there was a list of twenty state suspects that the RJAF received and acted upon. Accordingly, the Air Force is a sub-section of the Armed forces that has the responsibility of completing state tasks entirely without question¹. In this case, the intelligence wing compiled a list of twenty terror suspects whom the RJAF intercepted and eliminated for the

¹

Itani, Nadine M. "Policy development framework for aviation strategic planning in developing countries." (2015).

greater good of the kingdom. Jordan is geographically situated in the center of the Middle East, thereby making it a globally strategic state for launching counter-terrorism activities.

5. Apart from the combat operations mentioned above, the Air force also acts as a strategic airlift for military assets, including weapons, equipment, and people. The Air Force assisted the ground forces by making quick deliveries to their points of operations. The Royal Jordanian Air Force received supplies of munitions and precision bombs from the United States in the summer of 2015, for use against ISIS². Additionally, they assisted the Jordanian Armed Forces in monitoring their borders by delivering supplies for counter-terrorism operations. The supplies included sixteen Bell AH-1e/F Cobras³. This is in fulfillment of their counter-insurgency role for the country and in commitment to end acts of terrorism within the country. Also, the RJAF conducts reconnaissance missions in areas of interest to the military.

6. As terrorist activities in the region increase, so does the strategic value of the Kingdom of Jordan as a central hub from which to launch coalition counter-terrorism operations in the Middle East. The country is a key member of the anti-Islamic State coalition and provides the base for coalition air campaigns against terrorist groups in the region, due to its proximity to Syria and Iraq. The King's position against terrorism earned the kingdom joint efforts from the United States in the war against ISIS. The collaboration between the United States Department of Defense and Jordan has seen an increase in provisions of not only security assistance but also economic support and humanitarian aid. The joint activities with the US have facilitated additional training for Jordan soldiers, which is very helpful. Additionally, the involvement of the superpower in the war has encouraged the activities of humanitarian organizations such as the USAID and refugee programs.

Coalition AF for Jordan Air Force and Importance

7. The RJAF conducts a lot of exercises such as the Eager Lion training, which is a critical element to enhance joint operations. The Eager Lion training offered an opportunity for the US air force and RJAF to undergo a decisive mission exercise on how to tackle recovery missions as well as the approaches to utilize when landing aircraft on the enemy territory⁴. This joint training aimed at equipping the RJAF with the necessary skills for contributing to global security and interoperability. There were training goals during the Eager Lion, and these targeted different groups. These goals included precision strikes, personnel recovery, and global access. The training process ensured that all the team members had the opportunity and capability of training with their overall partner forces on the various issues such as controlling the aircraft's' desert landings and ground terrain urban assault.

8. Such exercises were essential as they helped the RJAF to learn the importance of working as a team until the mission is successfully completed. It is also important to note that the United

² Jordanian armed forced, strategic planning department 2015

³ Jordanian armed forced, strategic planning department 2015

⁴ Nafrada, Caesar Jordan. "US Air Force Intelligence Officer Transformation." (2014).

States of America Central Command hosted the Eager Lion event in 2017 in Jordan. This was conducted as part of joint team training and aimed at equipping the soldiers with the knowledge on the importance of strengthening the relationship among the military groups. The training is key and essentials; it helped to provide the RJAF with the combined like-minded elements as well as assisting them to have interoperability, which aims at blending and enhancing capabilities. Therefore, it offers the opportunity for the Jordanian Air force team to have skills and understanding of precision strikes. This not only ensured the development of the process of identifying precise targets but also ensuring resident capabilities to execute eliminations on the various targets.

Successes of Jordan Air Force

9. The operations of the Royal Jordanian Air Force were successful due to the relevance of the intelligence they receive, their proximity to the capital of ISIS, and timeliness of their operations. The US DoD, in collaboration with Jordanian Armed Forces, avail essential information on the whereabouts of the terrorists and provided sufficient data that aid in early preparedness for battles⁵. The valuable intelligence helps the team to identify potential targets to avoid casualties and capture the primary perpetrators. Additionally, the proximity of the country to Syria and Iraq enables the Air Force to carry out attacks within shorter periods, thereby reducing the chance of the terrorist strategizing and regrouping against coalition forces⁶. Further, some instances like the recent attack in Raqqa owe their successes to the timeliness of the raid. The fact that the Jordanian military reacted only two days after the murder of the Jordanian pilot made it easy for the operation to succeed as the assailants did not have sufficient time to plan for their defense.

Challenges Facing the Jordan Air Force

10. Despite the afore-mentioned military advancements in Jordan, numerous security challenges may continue to disrupt peace and heighten terrorism. It was found that the occurrences of violence in the region have been on the rise with the continuation of the Syrian civil war, an increase in Islamism, and the resurgence of al Qaeda in Syria. These factors continually support terrorism and inhibit the safety of Jordanian borders, thereby exposing the inhabitants to heightened violence. Additionally, the increase in domestic religious extremism in the area poses numerous challenges in the control of terrorists and the management of security in the kingdom. As more people, some of them are Jordanian citizens, engage in terrorism by sympathizing and collaborating with jihadists, and it becomes more difficult to contain terrorists as these offer unexpected support to the extremists, thus jeopardizing internal security.

11. The other outstanding challenge in maintaining peace and stability in the region is the possibility of decline or discontinuation of American military support to Jordan under the current

⁵ Cash, Gabriel Leigh. "A Comparative Analysis of Jordanian and United States Counterterrorism." PhD diss., Appalachian State University, 2018.

⁶ Nečas, Pavel, Martina Vacková, and Peter Lošonczy. "Air Power as a Security Factor: Case study Syria." *INCAS Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (2019).

Trump regime. The current administration of the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump is considering reducing the state's expenditure on the war against terrorism, mainly by cutting down the aid it offers to countries like Jordan. This implies that the support the kingdom receives from the superpower in terms of arms, equipment, and financial assistance is subject to decline or stop pending the unpredictable decision of the post-Obama presidency⁷. The Jordan administration is currently experiencing a lot of uncertainty regarding the continued support of the United States in fighting terrorism. Irrespective of the long-standing relationship between the two states, it is impossible to tell if the alliance would stay in the face of changing foreign policies. Given their involvement with the west, Jordan has made substantial enemies in the Middle East. The withdrawal of international support may leave them vulnerable to the operations of neighboring elite forces.

12. The troops also face numerous operational challenges in their dealings with the ISIS terror groups. The processes of combating ISIS militia, capturing them, search and rescue operations for hostages are challenging to undertake due to the simple fact that ISIS does not abide by the same laws of armed conflict as Jordanian troops. Accordingly, the terrorists hide amongst innocent citizens, making it difficult to tell them apart. The challenge poses a security risk to the soldiers on the ground, as a potential jihadist may seem like a hostage only to turn hostile abruptly. Moreover, the situation makes it difficult for the army to expressly attack a region because of the fear of Collateral damage. The capture of potential terrorists is also risky for the military due to their suicidal tactics, thereby causing the death of the team and the destruction of military assets.

13. Nonetheless, several factors decrease the chances of success in the operation. One of the main reasons for failing to achieve the utmost success in operations against ISIS is the predominant and ever-increasing religious extremism in the region. As the terrorists recruit and absorb more Jordanian citizens into ISIS, it becomes difficult for the Royal Jordanian Air Force to detect potential terrorists and subdue impending attacks⁸. The large number of sympathizers also assists the terrorists to acquire sleeper cells from where they plan and instigate crime unnoticed. Similarly, the infiltration of terrorists into the Jordanian army or its affiliated units has had a significant effect on the successes of the operations against terrorism. In more than one instance, agents within the forces engage in terrorism against their unsuspecting colleagues. The presence of double agents in military operations enables the ISIS militia to perform classified attacks like the Amman compound attack, therefore, jeopardizing military operations.

14. Due to the impenetrability of the Jordan border into Iraq and Syria, the Hashemite Kingdom Of Jordan relies heavily on airstrikes and does not intend to utilize ground soldiers in the war against terrorism. Although this allows the Jordanian Air Force to stay safe and attack aggressively, it results in a high number of civilian casualties, including the Sunni tribe, who are friendly to the Jordan administration. To minimize the loss of life of his Army, King Abdullah intensifies aerial warfare with the help of F-16 fighter jets, which drop a combination of

⁷ Al Sharafat, A., 2020. The United States' Interests in the Middle East During the Obama Administration: Jordan–A Case Study. In *International Trade Policies in the Era of Globalization* (pp. 144-162). IGI Global.

⁸ Rothe, C. "Jordan and the New Front in the Fight Against ISIS." *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism* (2015).

conventional and precision munitions on their targets⁹. Nonetheless, the attacks result in massive destruction of properties and objectives. Therefore, there is a dire need for the Jordanian air force to increase the use of precision-guided explosives to minimize the collateral damage. Additionally, the use of drones for the attack would ensure more precision-guided bombs that would, in turn, minimize civilian casualties.

CONCLUSION

15. Jordanian Air force has been effective in combating the terror warfare in the Middle East. The Air Force has, in the past, conducted successful missions in Syria and Iraq. The Jordanian Air Force has been successful in its mission, and this includes conducting air patrols, surveillance, protecting the country's territory, and reconnaissance protection. Though the vast majority of missions conducted by the RJAF are successful, there have been some second and third-order effects that have increased support for terrorist activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Various recommendations can be drawn from the Jordanian Air Force. These recommendations not only aims at improving the terror warfare in the Jordan Country but can also be used by other Air Forces such as CAF. First, CAF should work to developing an approach of dealing with the increased terror and resurgences often perpetrated by militia groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS. CAF should create a plan of having their own dependent system for fighting terror activities because of an over-reliance on external help and support can stop anytime just like what almost happened with Jordan. The CAF should also start thinking of implementing the Hybrid warfare concept as the RJAF did. Such as the use of different platforms that can fly for a long duration and at low cost.

⁹

Wallin, Matthew. "US Military Bases and Facilities in the Middle East." *American Security Project* (2018).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al Sharafat, A., 2020. The United States' Interests in the Middle East during the Obama Administration: Jordan—A Case Study. In *International Trade Policies in the Era of Globalization* (pp. 144-162). IGI Global.
- Cash, Gabriel Leigh. "A Comparative Analysis of Jordanian and United States Counterterrorism." Ph.D. diss., Appalachian State University, 2018.
- Jordanian armed forces, strategic planning department 2015
- Hoffman, Bruce. "Combating Terrorism: Adapting Global Strategy to the Evolving Threats of a New Decade." *Geo. J. Int'l Aff.* 13 (2012): 91.
- Itani, Nadine M. "Policy development framework for aviation strategic planning in developing countries." (2015).
- Nafrada, Caesar Jordan. "US AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER TRANSFORMATION." (2014).
- Nečas, Pavel, Martina Vacková, and Peter Lošonczi. "Air Power as a Security Factor: Case study Syria." *INCAS Bulletin* 11, no. 1 (2019).
- Rothe, C. "Jordan and the New Front in the Fight Against ISIS." *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism* (2015).
- Sharp, Jeremy Maxwell. *Jordan: Background and US relations*. Congressional Research Service, 2013.
- Wallin, Matthew. "US Military Bases and Facilities in the Middle East." *American Security Project* (2018).