



Jordan Overview October and November 2018

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Glossary

AND	Anti-Narcotics Department
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INGO	International Non-Government Agency
IS	Islamic State
SOP	Security Operating Procedure
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security

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Much of the text in this report is in *italic*. This is to illustrate that the contents are conjecture. Whilst the report reflects the current situation in northwest Syria, the analysis, views and opinions expressed are those of the author.

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Location	Risk Level	Summary and Recommendations
Amman & main roads and highways – except in locations specified below as different.	Low	Whilst the country is largely unaffected by conflict, its proximity to the troubles in Syria, the Government's involvement in the Coalition air campaign against IS and the number of Jordanians fighting with Islamic Extremist groups means the threat of a terrorist campaign is present. Agencies must therefore have the full complement of SOPs and Contingency Plans should the situations worsen. A major inhibitor to a terrorist attack is the Jordanian Intelligence and Security Forces who have proved to be successful in the past in preventing some attacks. Equally the Police force has a good international reputation and transport Police are ever present on the roads. The main threat is from road traffic accident and demonstrations that are occasionally violent. Good travel SOPs are recommended containing the use of seat belts, what to do after a road traffic accident, vehicle safety checks and regular maintenance. Daily monitoring of the situation through local news, UNDSS reports and INGO Security Forum is recommended to avoid demonstrations. SOPs on how staff should behave if caught in a demonstration are also recommended.
Irbid	Low	Irbid has experienced IS activity in the past and occasional tribal disputes. It is also located only 10 km from the border with Syria opposite Daraa. Risk Levels are currently low but can increase to Moderate or High should a serious incident occur.
Mafraq	Low	Mafraq regularly experiences protests and social disorder. Most are peaceful but main roads can be closed. Agencies travelling to Mafraq or through on route to Zaa'tri Camp are recommended to check the route is clear before travelling.
Zaa'tri Camp	Low	The main threats in the camp are fire, traffic accidents, and violent personal disputes. Drivers must be instructed to drive carefully in the camp, buildings must have safe electrical wiring and programmes must have Fire Regulations with regular drills.
Within 5km of the border with Syria	Moderate	There is the high Police and military presence on the border. Permits may be necessary to visit the areas near the border and Liaison Office's must be consulted before travelling. Visit should only be made if essential and kept short.

Issues and Events



ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY AND CRISIS

In recent years Jordan's economy has been severely damaged by war and politics in the region. Because it lacks the natural resources of its Arab neighbours, Jordan's ability to weather through difficult times is limited.

Jordan's total foreign debt in 2011 was \$19 billion, representing 60% of its GDP. In 2016, the debt reached \$35.1 billion representing 93% of its GDP. This substantial increase is mostly attributed to the effects of regional war, conflict, the rise in extremists and the Arab Spring. More specifically:

- The closure of the Syria and Iraq border crossings. Most of Jordan's trade passed through the crossings and as a result trade with the countries collapsed.
- A decrease in tourism.
- A decrease in foreign investment.
- An increase in military expenditure.
- Attacks on the Egyptian gas pipeline supplying the Kingdom. This increased the use more expensive fuel sources.
- The expenses from hosting 1.4 million Syrian refugees.
- A fall in oil prices led to a massive reduction in foreign aid – as a semi-rentier economy, Jordan depends on such foreign grants and aid.
- Saudi Arabia and the UAE withholding \$1 billion in annual economic assistance. Although following the mass anti-tax reform demonstrations in Jun 2018, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait promised \$2.5 billion aid over the course of 5 years.

Furthermore, this difficult situation is compounded by lack of government transparency, tribalism, weak governance over national wealth, endemic corruption, high unemployment, political inequality, and income and wealth inequality.

PROTESTS

Recent years has seen an increase in demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and sometimes road blockages. Protests were at a high in June 2018 when tens of thousands demonstrated on the streets against price increases and a tax reform bill. Several days of mass protest resulted in the bill being dropped and the Prime Minister resigning. *Comment: The protests were also notable for not being led by traditional opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or left-wing parties, but by independent civil society groups and professional associations. Most protesters were young and belonged to the Jordanian middle and working class.*

Currently there are several protests a week around the country, but mostly in Amman. They are usual small to medium in size and are over in a few hours. Whilst most are peaceful, the police and security forces will act quickly and violently if they feel the need. Reasons for recent protests have been:

- Taxi drivers protesting against app-based ride-sharing taxi services.
- An amendment to the income tax bill.
- Delayed implementation of a proposed prisoner amnesty.
- Protests linked to the deaths of students in a flash flood near the Dead Sea.
- Association of Agricultural Engineers and other unions protest after talks with government officials failed to resolve labour issues.
- Local residents protest about the arrest of their neighbour.

Popular location for demonstrations in Amman is the 4th circle near the Jordan Hospital and Prime Minister's office.



TORRENTIAL RAIN AND FLASH FLOODS

In Oct and Nov Jordan suffered weeks of torrential rain that caused severe flooding. Flash flooding has occurred in several areas, including Petra and Wadi Musa (both Madaba governorate). At least 22 people have been killed and 35 others injured; most of the casualties were incurred when flash floods swept away a school bus full of students and teachers visiting the Dead Sea. The ancient city of Petra was closed to tourists and a temporary state of emergency was declared in the capital Amman during clean-up operations. *Comment: Further heavy rainfall is forecast for Dec.*

OPENING OF BORDER CROSSING BETWEEN JORDAN AND SYRIA

After 3 years of closure the Jaber/Nassib border crossing between Jordan and Syria was reopened on 15 Oct. for commercial goods and people. *Comment: The opening will bring financial relief to both the Governments of Jordan and Syria. It is also a diplomatic victory for Syria's President Assad, whose government has been isolated from its Arab neighbours since the war began in 2011.*

JORDAN TO REGAIN LAND FROM ISRAEL

For 25 years 30 Israeli farmers have had the use of 2 areas of land, 405 hectares, on the Jordan-Israel border. The farmers were given land and travel rights as part of the 1994 peace treaty between the two countries. This agreement expires next year and the Government of Jordan announced it will not renew the rights. The Government of Israel is still planning to negotiate an extension. *Comment: The King of Jordan is under pressure from his Parliament not to renew the deal. The Government of Israel is under pressure to ensure the livelihoods of the 30 farmers. Reportedly Israel could use threats to cut water supplies or stop the deal that allows planes travelling between Europe and Jordan to fly over Israel. The issue is unlikely to escalate and threaten the peace deal between the two countries.*

SYRIAN REFUGEE UPDATE

Estimated number of Syrians refugees in Jordan: 1,380,000 of which 671,148 are registered (126,064 in camps, 545,084 out of camps). A recent survey conducted by NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions in Nov 2018 found:

- 33 per cent of Syrian refugees said that they "will never go back"
- 24 per cent said they "probably will not go back"

Health – A rise in health costs for refugees has led Syrians to miss essential check-ups.

Livelihoods – More than 85% of Syrian refugees in towns and cities live below the poverty line of US\$3 per day. In Nov 3,168 work permits were issued, a decrease on previous months. Between 1 Jan and 30 Nov 125,392 work permits have been issued (Male: 119,984, Female: 5,408)

Cash Assistance – The UNHCR Cash Assistance programme helped 139,067 individuals in Nov – equal to US\$5.957.147.

POLICE CRACKDOWN ON DRUGS

The Anti-Narcotics Department (AND) handled 1,831 drug offenses in a crackdown during Oct 2018. Reportedly a total of 23kg of cannabis, over 404,000 Captagon drug pills, 910 bags of joker and different quantities of other narcotics were seized. Some 2,472 people were involved in the drug-related offenses.