

# As Jordan and ISIS Exchange Executions, Folly of US “War on Terror” Looms

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The Jordanian government has confirmed the execution of two jailed Iraqis, both accused of being jihadist militants who planned or participated in attacks within Jordan, in retaliation for the execution by the Islamic State of a captured Jordanian pilot whose death was shown in a video released Tuesday.

**“What killed Kassarbeh was not Islam. What killed him are the new dynamics of globalisation and transnational violence that have consumed the Middle East and the Islamic world, unleashed by the 2003 Iraq war and the 2011 Syrian civil war.” –Asst. Prof. Ibrahim al-Marashi**

[According](#) to *McClatchy*:

*Jordanian state television said one of the executed prisoners was Sajida al Rishawi, the 44-year-old Iraqi woman whose release the Islamic State had demanded in return for the life of a Japanese hostage killed last week. The other was Ziad al-Karbouli, a jihadist who once worked with Abu Musab al Zarqawi, the Jordanian who founded al Qaida in Iraq, the organization that was the precursor to the Islamic State.*

*Government spokesman Mohammed al Momani announced in Amman that the two prisoners had been executed at dawn. Both Karbouli and Rishawi had been in prison for nearly a decade.*

*Jordan had announced that it would move quickly to avenge the murder of Lt. Moaz al Kasasbeh whose horrific execution was made public Tuesday by an Islamic State video that showed him*

*being led to a cage in the desert, doused with gasoline and set alight.*

*The Guardian [adds](#):*

*The fate of Kasasbeh – a member of a large tribe that forms the backbone of support for the country’s Hashemite monarchy – has gripped Jordan for weeks and some Jordanians have criticised King Abdullah for embroiling them in the US-led alliance that they say will provoke a militant backlash.*

*Some analysts believe Amman could now escalate its involvement in the campaign against Islamic State, which has seized large areas of Iraq and [Syria](#), Jordan’s neighbours to the north and east. US officials told Reuters on Tuesday the killing of Kasasbeh would likely harden Jordan’s position as a member of the coalition against Islamic State.*

Though many Jordanians have expressed criticism against the nation’s monarchy government for participating in the U.S.-led war on the Islamic State (aka ISIS or ISIL), analysts vary on their assessment about how the execution of the pilot, who was burned alive, will shift public sentiment and impact the overall war which has ensnared the Middle East.

Several observers have taken the opportunity of these latest developments to reflect on how the mindset and tactics employed in what has become known as the “global war on terror” or (GWOT)–spearhead by the U.S. military–are inextricably linked to what is commonly referred to as the “barbarism” and “savagery” of non-state militant actors like ISIS.

In a post [published](#) on *The Intercept* on Wednesday, journalist and columnist Glenn Greenwald explores how the ritualistic condemnation of ISIS—who he acknowledges is a group “indescribably nihilistic and morally grotesque”—also serves

the purpose of obfuscating the inherent violence and depravity of the military campaign that the U.S. has waged in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere over the last twelve or more years. After documenting numerous incidents in which the U.S. military's use of drones, hellfire missiles, white phosphorous, and other weaponry that have resulted in the maiming and death of countless civilians, including many who were "burned alive," Greenwald writes:

*Unlike ISIS, the U.S. usually (though not always) tries to suppress (rather than gleefully publish) evidence showing the victims of its violence. Indeed, concealing stories about the victims of American militarism is a critical part of the U.S. government's strategy for maintaining support for its sustained aggression. That is why, in general, the U.S. media has a policy of systematically excluding and ignoring such victims (although disappearing them this way does not actually render them nonexistent).*

*One could plausibly maintain that there is a different moral calculus involved in (a) burning a helpless captive to death as opposed to (b) recklessly or even deliberately burning civilians to death in areas that one is bombing with weapons purposely designed to incinerate human beings, often with the maximum possible pain. That's the moral principle that makes torture specially heinous: sadistically inflicting pain and suffering on a helpless detainee is a unique form of barbarity.*

*But there is nonetheless something quite obfuscating about this beloved ritual of denouncing the unique barbarism of ISIS. It is true that ISIS seems to have embraced a goal – a strategy – of being incomparably savage, inhumane and morally repugnant. That the group is indescribably nihilistic and morally grotesque is beyond debate.*

*That's exactly what makes the intensity of these repeated*

*denunciation rituals somewhat confounding. Everyone decent, by definition, fully understands that ISIS is repellent and savage. While it's understandable that being forced to watch the savagery on video prompts strong emotions (although, again, hiding savagery does not in fact make it less savage), it's hard to avoid the conclusion that the ritualistic expressed revulsion has a definitive utility.*

[And writing](#) for *Al-Jazeera English*, Ibrahim al-Marashi, an assistant history professor at California State University, puts the latest tit-for-tat violence between Jordan and ISIS within a historical context—rooted in the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003—that speaks to the growing and worrying way in which the cycle of violence and acts of terrorism and aggression (including by states, aspiring states, and non-state actors) have created and fostered the current situation:

*To recap, a Jordanian, [Abu Musab] al-Zarqawi moved from Jordan to Afghanistan to Iraq in 2001, set up a terrorist group that killed thousands of Iraqis, and dispatched Iraqis to Jordan in 2005 to kill Jordanians and a prominent Syrian director. A Jordanian pilot, sent to combat a transnational terrorist group in Syria and Iraq is killed in 2015 by that very group established by a fellow Jordanian.*

*What killed Kassasbeh was not Islam. What killed him are the new dynamics of globalisation and transnational violence that have consumed the Middle East and the Islamic world, unleashed by the 2003 Iraq war and the 2011 Syrian civil war.*

*While sympathies to ISIL might have existed among elements in Jordan's society, this execution will most likely strengthen Jordanian resolve in combating this group. In the impoverished Jordanian town of [Maan, support for ISIL](#) has been vocal and explicit, with inhabitants of the town flying ISIL's flag.*

*Kassasbeh's death will most likely harden Jordanian resolve*

*and eliminate any public sympathy for ISIL. However, Jordan is now at a critical juncture. A heavy handed response by the Jordanian state against Maan in light of Kassasbeh's execution might have the inverse effect of dissipating any sympathy for the pilot's death, and spur some of its citizens to join ISIL.*

*How the Jordanian security forces and the state will react after the death of its pilot will have ramifications for its long-term security. Jordan has announced [it has executed Rishawi](#) in response to Kassasbeh's death. As I wrote in response to [Obama's State of the Union](#) speech, state-sanctioned violence in response to non-state actor violence will continue to produce an endless cycle of violence if not coupled with addressing the conditions – unemployment, humiliation, lack in governance – that produce terrorism in the first place.*

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