

**HUMANITARIAN
AND DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME**

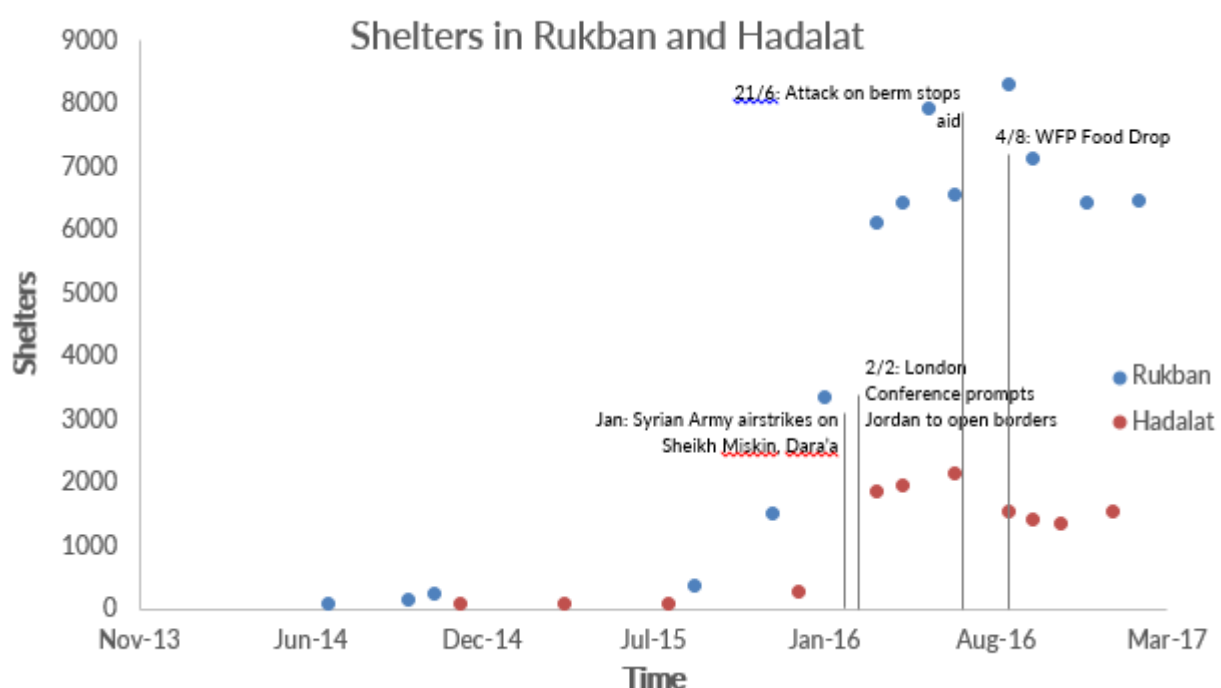
Jordan and the Berm Rukban and Hadalat 2017-2018

March 2017

HUMANITARIAN FORESIGHT THINK TANK

KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. Borders will remain closed to Syrian asylum-seekers apart from extraordinary cases.
2. Humanitarian functions will be carried out by private actors allied to the Jordanian Armed Forces.
3. Humanitarian organisations will struggle to meet the needs of Syrian asylum-seekers in a shrinking, hostile space.



INTRODUCTION

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, civilians have sought asylum in neighbouring countries. During the first two years of the war, like Lebanon and Turkey, Jordan welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees inside its borders¹. However, in mid-2013, the country began to enact more severe border policies, restricting access first along western parts of its border, and then in mid-2014 along the eastern part that had remained the last point of transit into the country. This led to a severe humanitarian situation for the thousands of asylum seekers who arrived at Jordan's border fleeing airstrikes. Though traffic across the border slowed dramatically, Syrians from Hama, Aleppo, Deir Ezzor and Dara'a began to arrive at the barren double mounds of dirt

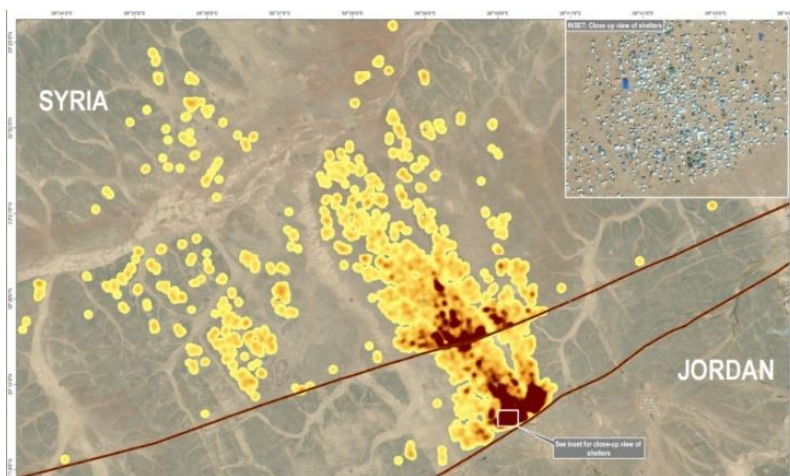
¹ The registered UNHCR figure of refugees is 656,170. [UNHCR](#): "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal."

delineating Syrian and Jordanian borders, known as the 'berm', in far greater numbers by October 2015.

The surge in government and Russian-led aerial bombardments, coalition airstrikes and the expansion of the Islamic State in these parts of the country contributed to the influx. People settled into two informal encampments in a 'demilitarized zone' (DMZ) between Jordan and Syria at the northern Rukban and southern Hadalat crossings, along two manmade dirt border demarcations called the 'berm'. Conditions in the camps have and continue to be severe, as the land there boasts neither trees nor vegetation and is host to severe winters and summers. Although it is clear that a significant proportion of the population fluctuates due to conflict or aid provision², nevertheless, by late 2016 the population climbed to 85,000 people across both camps.

RUKBAN: CURRENT CONTEXT

Rukban is the larger of the two settlements, greater recipient of aid and more chaotic. The camp hosts an estimated 77,500 Syrian asylum seekers primarily coming from eastern governorates of Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, Homs and Raqqa. Closer to the Iraqi border, it is only 30 km from the al-Tanaf border crossing with Iraq, which was a site of active conflict in 2016³. Since its inception,



UNOSAT 6 December 2016 UNOSAT Shelter density map at Rukban

the camp has been plagued by rioting, conflict and violence between armed groups that wanted a stake in lucrative trade. Large tribal confederations from Palmyra dominate dynamics in the settlement due to their early role in bringing asylum seekers to the border area and back and trading food and medicine, then vis-à-vis the humanitarian sector, providing security, representation and organizing the distribution of aid as

intermediary community leaders facing INGOs and UN agencies.

The JAF and UN agencies agreed months ago to move the distribution point from the southern Jordan berm near the Rukban military base six km northwest into Syrian territory and have been busy constructing water networks to prepare the new point, which was scheduled to open in early February, which could impact water distribution at the older distribution point. Ongoing

² The locations that these 10 to 20,000 IDPs (representing the range of fluctuation) return to has not been carefully monitored due to access restrictions, but areas in Homs government could be included.

³ [Livemap](#) ISIS (5 March 2016): "The IS recaptured AL-Tanaf border crossing. The New Syrian Army withdrew."

discussions with community leaders have suggested that the community will not move, and that the main reason for their presence in the unwelcoming place is the perceived safety of Jordan's border from airstrikes. Even when aid was withheld for several months in the summer of 2016, settlements decreased by only 17% based on satellite imagery of makeshift settlements⁴. There is also a possibility that communities could move towards Hadalat, and there is some evidence that the space separating the two settlements is filling with makeshift tents⁵. Hadalat would be further from anti-IS operations along the Syrian-Iraqi border, but would risk the same internal intra-factional conflict plaguing Rukban.

A market for all, at a cost

Transportation of people and goods to and from the berm remains monopolised by tribal groups present in the Badiya, particularly the al-Umour tribe. People hoping to reach the border usually congregate 145 km north in the popular smuggling route point of Palmyra⁶, before taking a series of vehicles to the no-man's land. Trade is very lucrative, and reaches rebel-held areas of Dara'a with strong tribal links to the Tribal Army security force in charge of distribution, as well as to and from government and IS-held areas. Conflict arises only when armed groups perceive they are not receiving a commensurate share of the resources. In addition to smugglers charging large sums to reach the area, Rukban is home to a large market in the northern part of the Syrian berm, where medicine, food and non-food items can be found at exorbitant prices⁷. Goods typically arrive from the service town of al-Hamad 80km north of the camp⁸.

It is also widely acknowledged that tribal groups have captured portions of services; NFIs and food items provided by humanitarian interventions and are profiting from them by providing access for a fee. There are similar reports concerning access to medical care⁹. As the Jordanian authorities restrict direct access, needs assessment and post-distribution monitoring are next to impossible to fully evaluate the extent of this capture, but it has certainly disincentivized some actors from broader interventions.

Governance and organisation

As Syrian government authority deteriorated and numerous armed groups proliferated, tribal affiliations played an increasingly prominent role in the conflict, providing security and representative governance structures, particularly in parts of the country without a strong government presence. The largest tribes in the area come from the eastern Badiya desert area, rural Damascus, and eastern Homs, including al-Umour (Palmyra and Homs), Bani Khaled (border of central Hama and Homs, prominent in Jordan), al-Rawalah and al-Shaga'a (eastern Qalamoun and rural Damascus), al-Ghiath, al-Hassan, al-Masaid and al-Sherfat (Jordan and

⁴ Calculation based on UNOSAT data. [UNITAR](#): "Maps: Syria"

⁵ Interview with the International NGO Safety Organisation: INSO 1/3/2017.

⁶ UNHCR (April 2016): "Overview: Rukban Security Context."

⁷ IMMAP (September 2016): "The Berm: Situation Update."

⁸ UNHCR (April 2016): "North Eastern Jordan: Context."

⁹ UNHCR (April 2016): "Overview: Rukban Security Context."

Syrian tribes on the border of Sweidah) and Naeem (Palmyra)¹⁰. Al-Amour has had some degree of control over the black market of smuggled goods, as well as access to goods provided by the international community and Gulf charities.

To an extent, the similar kinship and tribal ties of asylum seekers hailing from the same areas allowed for a certain degree of success in these systems. Sheikhs intervene on behalf of tribesmen facing issues, and third tribes are asked to mediate. The Border Guard Force has also been asked to adjudicate matters on occasion but officially adopts a policy of non-intervention.

It is important to note however that the BGF are not above or indifferent to these structures, and in fact form a part of them as many of these tribal links extend across state borders¹¹, and have dictated the terms of trust, of economics and of security between government representatives on the Jordanian side of the berm, and Syrians opposite them. They have also proven powerful in negotiations with

Logistics

Logistical challenges also continue unabated, regarding the difficult road conditions to reach the area, particularly following rains and sandstorms, navigation, communication; and even the shifting sands of communication protocols between the Border Guards and agencies, which require constant negotiation. Jordan's own security priorities mean that no screening of asylum seekers is undertaken on either side of the berm, and that weapons are present in the camp. Despite experimenting with numerous distribution modalities, insecurity continues unabated, with no successful distribution undertaken since November 2016 until January 2017.

the humanitarian community, as Jordanian authorities acknowledge that tribal structures are inextricably tied to distributions and representation. Particularly following the June 2016 IS attack, to further secure the berm the JAF allowed greater latitude to tribal groups, allowing them to informally carry weapons to ensure their security¹², and recently, establish courts, a civil police force and counter the Tribal Army as a legitimate civilian council. The coalescing of tribes into a civilian militia will likely further cement their relations with border guards, who will play a role in their training.

Not all residents are influenced by these structures to the same degree. Certain tribes, like the al-Umour, who represent an estimated 18,000 people in the community¹³, are large enough to attempt to dominate the camp and its economy in contravention of common, shared community principles. Other more recent arrivals hailing from more urbanised areas like Homs or further south are not incorporated under the broader umbrella of tribal representation, and it is likely that their households are not necessarily represented to humanitarian actors.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Particularly with the Bani Khaled tribe, this dynamic was also represented in military appointments to the area in 2016.

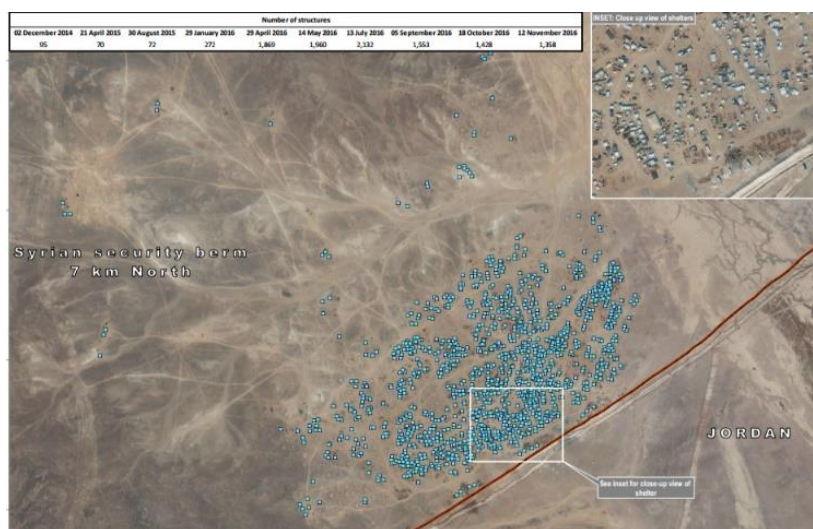
¹² Palmyra Tribal Council interview 25/12/2016.

¹³ UNHCR (April 2016): "Overview: Rukban Security Context."

HADALAT: CURRENT CONTEXT

Hadalat is the smaller of the two settlements, southeast from Rukban by approximately 110 km. The area hosts an estimated 7,500 Syrians (1,532 estimated shelters)¹⁴. As in Rukban, it is estimated that two-thirds of the population is women and children¹⁵. Though the camp has not witnessed any of the security challenges of Rukban, it has not received a concurrent amount of aid or attention as its neighbour. The camp hosts a population hailing predominantly from southern governorates of Dara'a, Suweida and Quneitra, and is arguably less tribal¹⁶. Unlike in Rukban, where community representatives are tribal leaders, Hadalat's representatives have more commonly been working professionals.

Estimated settlement numbers in Hadalat camp have fluctuated less than at Rukban, possibly due to the fact that it is reportedly difficult to leave the settlement once people have been brought to the area by tribes who operate in the region, and the lack of aid and market access makes it less appealing to those who are not already extremely vulnerable¹⁷. On July 12 2016 the Hadalat crossing was targeted by a Russian airstrike, killing several family members of the Asoud al-Sharqiya (Eastern Lions) force training in the area. Even after the airstrike the population only decreased by an estimated 27% based on satellite imagery¹⁸.



UNOSAT Shelters at Hadalat Border Crossing November 22, 2016.

KEY CONTEXT DEVELOPMENTS

1. Militarisation of Space and Aid

Since the 21 June Islamic State VBIED bombing that killed seven Jordan Border Patrol guards, the Jordanian government's primary objective has been to sustain security along its northern

¹⁴ Jordan Refugee Response (November 2016): "Operational Update on the resumption of life-saving assistance at the berm."

¹⁵ Jordan Refugee Response (March 2017): "Operational Update on the resumption of life-saving assistance at the berm."

¹⁶ Also reports of people from Deir Ezzor coming to both settlements. Williams, Sara Elizabeth. *Vice News* (4 May 2016): "War Equals Profit in the Wild West of the Syria-Jordan DMZ."

¹⁷ Though there are reports that beneficiaries who wish to leave Rukban for Hadalat blame the tribal capture of water, food, NFI and health care access at Rukban.

¹⁸ Based on estimated UNOSAT figures.

border, pursuing this objective by first halting access for asylum seekers, and then restricting humanitarian interventions, by claiming that Islamic State elements exist in the settlements. This rhetoric escalated in December 2016 following a string of suicide bombings at the border and an IS attack in Karak¹⁹. The berm, which marks the convergence of Iraqi, Syrian and Jordanian borders, is experiencing an uptick in Islamic State intrusions until late February²⁰, targeting the Jordan-backed Tribal Army militia protecting the berm.

The Tribal Army led by Sheikh Rakan Khdeir has been a cornerstone of the government's policy to depend on militias as a buffer force between Syria and Iraq, asylum seekers, the Jordanian border and anti-Islamic State military offensives launched from the forward operating base two kilometres from Rukban. The militia and other shell companies affiliated with Khdeir, like Badiya logistics, has been empowered by the Jordanian government alongside other contracting companies operated by former Jordanian military, as a necessary element of distributions and access for humanitarian actors, which allows all humanitarian activities to become aligned with government objectives.

While the strategy aimed to secure the berm population from Islamic State attacks and more restive tribal elements exploiting the population through smuggling and aid capture, it has arguably backfired. The Tribal Army is in effect targeted both by the Islamic State as a symbol of Jordanian and US support; and by tribal elements in the camp and its environs, who no longer benefit financially from aid capture during distribution, and sees the Army as a parasitic and external force originating from Dara'a rather than the eastern desert²¹. Nevertheless, the group fulfils the purpose of securing borders, and will carry out the government's policy to shift a distribution point further into Syria to expand the buffer between the asylum seeker population and border.

The Jordanian Armed Forces' oversight of military and humanitarian agendas has prioritised the former regarding access to beneficiaries, but not systematic security checks; the training and oversight of various jostling militias; and the implementation of security policies that require the use of private security contractors to access asylum seekers. Not only does this approach neglect humanitarian principles, but it also creates power inequities among militias who will work with the highest bidder and empowers tribal groups who will become increasingly disenchanted with state power and interference.

2. Internal pressures mount in the kingdom, increasing anti-refugee rhetoric and security-first approach

¹⁹ On 18 December, 11 Jordanians, a Canadian tourist, five local attackers from the Karak area and four police were killed in the shootout at the Karak castle and in its aftermath. *The Jordan Times* (19 December 2016):

"Jordanians say Karak attack only makes them stronger in face of terrorism." *Middle East North Africa Financial Network* (22 December 2016): "Suspect of funding attack held - 4 policemen killed in new shootout."

²⁰ *AlAraby* (18 December 2016): "Deadly bombing hits Syrian refugee camp on Jordan border."

²¹ Controversial efforts by World Vision to distribute aid and operate a warehouse in the berm area itself through security subcontracted through the Tribal Army culminated in unnecessary risk, and proved a powerful deterrent for other organisations

Conditions for a three-year line of IMF credit have caused increased fuel prices in Jordan, the removal of subsidies on energy and water, tax hikes and subsequent inflation on basic commodities and living expenses that are hitting Jordanians hard. Unemployment rates remain high, and the pressure of accommodating an estimated 1.3 million Syrian refugees²² within aging health and education systems is increasing tensions in host communities. This has put the government in a sensitive position as it attempts to consolidate greater powers through parliament by reshuffling cabinet, as it did in January 2017, to mitigate criticism. Humanitarian actors working in the Jordan context will be further incentivised by the government and donor agencies to shift interventions to host communities to prevent political instability.

Among Eastern Jordanians—the King’s traditional base of support—the last two years have highlighted poverty and decreasing access to power, and are causing a pushback and divisions at the highest levels of state, particularly in the intelligence sector, where family ties have impacted the country’s counterterrorism policies and set the sector against the armed forces²³. Following several high-profile attacks on US servicemen in country, western allies have pressured the kingdom to rein in the General Intelligence Directorate, which could increasingly pressure the sector and its affiliated kinsmen to mobilise against their waning power—something which would be seriously destabilizing for the state, for border security and for internal stability.

As protests against the Israeli-Jordan gas deal and rising prices proliferate across the country, the possibility that grassroots, disorganised manifestations take on a more organised form under the Muslim Brotherhood Islamic Action Front, tribal groups, or the HIRAK movement, will increase. This explains King Abdullah’s trip to Washington, to meet the incoming Trump administration and warn the government of the risks associated with movement of the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—a symbolic issue that could quickly escalate among the majority ethnic Palestinian population.

3. Intensification of Battle Against IS increases risk of influx to Jordan’s borders

Several recent developments in the berm area of note intersecting with Jordan’s security agenda will impact humanitarian response. As the battle against the Islamic State in Raqqa and Mosul progresses, so do fears of IS jihadists reaching the kingdom’s borders. The Rukban forward operating base next to the refugee settlement used by JAF, US and UK forces targeting IS in Iraq will remain in use, increasing the likelihood of a counterstrike impacting civilians. These factors caused the government in agreement with UN agencies to move humanitarian distribution north into Syria, ostensibly creating a buffer zone with the border. The Tribal Army and its affiliates have also been given a remit that now extends their forces until Dara’a barring an area within Sweida loyal to the Syrian government.

²² Jordan government estimate, while UNHCR has registered 630,000.

²³ Karak response regarding intelligence and members of the Karak community who had fought in Syria alongside the Islamic State and were released without observation due to tribal pressure, according to several interviews conducted in January and February.

While it is difficult to assess how ongoing Dara'a offensives against the government incorporating some elements of the Free Syrian Army and Jabhat Fath al-Sham could proceed, the Tribal Army has respected its mandate and avoided clashes with the government. However, the rebel offensive has empowered Islamic State affiliate and former MOC-backed FSA group Jaysh Khalid bin Walid (KBW) hovering near Israeli and Jordanian borders to seize several villages from its mountain stronghold and pressure rebel groups on two fronts²⁴. As some al-Qaeda-allied elements in the rebel coalition have worked with KBW in the past, share economic objectives and a revulsion towards the Syrian government, it is possible that the two fronts could merge and radicalise, pressuring the regime, which in turn would justify a stronger response from the government and place the Tribal Army by its proximity as a target, of either a more radicalised opposition, or the government itself.

4. Deteriorating Security Context Within the Berm

Insecurity and criminality have overwhelmed the Rukban settlement, with an upsurge in IS-claimed IED attacks (Oct 2016-January 2017) targeting Tribal Army security checkpoints, as well as regular clashes between the Eastern Lions brigade and the Tribal Army. This instability has had a severe impact on humanitarian access. Among the tribal population of Rukban, there has been little community support of the army and conflict between larger clans and the Army, have caused Jordanian authorities to increasingly allow the Palmyra tribes to provide their own security, oversee distributions by tribe alongside Army security, and organize a community police force constituted of tribes present in Rukban²⁵. Commensurately, the presence of armed militias Eastern Lions, Revolutionary Commandos and the Tribal Army in the camp has been reduced. All groups can no longer host an office in the settlement, nor carry weapons among the civilian population.

Despite these measures, intra-tribal and trade conflict within the berm has continued particularly around aid distributions. attempts at a WFP distribution in late February failed due to the presence of Eastern Lions at the distribution point, in addition to crowding and clashes at the site and mounting costs demanded by the Tribal Army to provide security for distributions²⁶. The lack of security has caused asylum seekers to coalesce at the transit site and distribution area, as well as along Jordan's berm, considered more secure due to proximity to border guards and the JAF. Only one full distribution has been carried out since November 2016 due to crowding and rioting. Criminality, civil disorder and armed assault are persistent challenges to the operating environment.

5. Dara'a Rebel-led Offensive Could Allow for Repositioning of Risky Ally Towards Dara'a Peace Process

In the last several months, Syrian government troops have made substantial gains in the southern governorate of Dara'a, deeply penetrating and bisecting Southern Front rebel-held

²⁴ *Middle East Eye* (7 March 2017): "New 'caliphate' rises in south Syria as IS loses grip on the north."

²⁵ Interview with representative of Palmyra Tribal Council 28/2/2017.

²⁶ Interview with UN agency 28/2/2017.

territory on the march to the Syrian-Jordanian border crossing of al-Naseeb. For its part, Jordanian Chief of Staff Mohammed Freihath said in an interview in late December 2016 that the kingdom wanted to reopen the border if security was affirmed on the other side of the border, read by most analysts as a clear signal of tacit approval for government moves. Though Southern Front groups have received considerable criticism for their lack of mobilizing against government forces in the past, a coalition of the rebels in addition to some groups associated with the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fath al-Sham (JFS) attacked regime-held parts of Dara'a in mid-February 2017.

The Jordanian government has been an active supporter of the Southern Front through the US, Saudi and Jordanian MOC based in Amman, which exerts control over rebel group military engagements, and reprimands them when they contravene MOC interests—which are to prevent more extremist Sunni groups like Jabhat Fath al-Sham (former Jabhat al-Nusra) from taking control of bordering areas, and compromising border security. The factions attacking Government of Syria positions in Dara'a city near Ramtha border in late February and early March 2017 alongside Fath al-Sham elements are slightly out of the realm of Amman's remit, and are arguably being led by Saudi and Qatar support. The Syrian government and its allies have been holding their positions without extending their territorial reach, and will likely save this easy victory until an orchestrated reconciliation agreement can be met, and Homs and Rural Damascus have been managed. However, the opportunistic territorial seizure by IS-affiliate Jaish Khalid bin Walid, a former MOC-backed group, the fact that the rebel coalition already contains al-Qaeda elements through its JFS association, and therefore could be targeted a terrorist coalition, could push rebel groups closer towards the Islamic State and away from their Jordan allies.

This shift could also disempower the static Jordan proxy Tribal Army among its Dara'a brethren and further delegitimise it from Dara'a military and political events. enough to weaken the kingdom's positioning within the political negotiations process, leading to the abandoning of their ally.

6. State consolidation of berm settlements: “just like Azraq or Zaatari”²⁷

In exchange for maintaining the closure of its northern border, the Jordanian government is investing in government-led development within the berm—particularly the northern Syrian elements of the settlement—under the guise of ‘humanitarianism’, developing humanitarian infrastructure including schools²⁸, clinics, rehabilitating wells and drilling bore holes through private contractors from the community with connections to Jordan's General Intelligence Director and Armed Forces. Even militia leader Sheikh Rakan Khdeir is adopting the civil development model, establishing his own NGO “Rukban Organization” (*Mu'assisat Rukban*) to

²⁷ Interview with member of Palmyra Tribal Council 17/2/2017.

²⁸ Interview with Action for Change, currently unregistered in Jordan, run by Palmyra resident from Amman, Kotaiba Abdullah 2/3/2017.

vertically integrate and consolidate his economic, political and military interests. It is likely that other military allies of the JAF will act similarly.

Members of the Palmyra Tribal Council insist that UNHCR will also be allowed to register Syrians through biometric fingerprint registration²⁹, which though seemingly unlikely is occurring at the moment in Hadalat by a former staff member of World Vision through his capacity as a private contractor. Nevertheless, the outcome of such registration is not certain, when it is highly improbable that asylum seekers will be allowed access into Jordan, that forces invested with providing security in the berm area will fairly distribute aid among the inhabitants of the no-man's land, or that the context will stabilize when there remains a huge influx of financial aid channelled through the Jordanian government to heavily armed actors empowered to maintain border security and little else in the region.

With the help of UN agencies and private contractors, the government will be able to maintain security and control the response, while simultaneously deflecting criticism for not dealing with humanitarian needs. If registration occurs, it will not alter the adherence of humanitarian actors to humanitarian principles nor will it improve the logistics of distribution to insure that aid reaches its intended beneficiaries, however it will improve the government's knowledge of the population and the security risk it holds.

HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS

Insecurity at the border and the absence of infrastructure combined with the unequivocal refusal of the Jordanian government to allow asylum seekers to enter its borders³⁰ has contributed to a difficult operating environment with reputational, security risks. Though it is tremendously difficult to assess the accuracy of information because of restrictions to access beneficiaries, a needs assessment conducted by World Vision, nearly 95% of households do not have enough food and depend on emergency coping strategies, eating one meal a day, and selling their tents to buy food³¹. INGOs have attempted to at least improve the logistical security issues between militias, to deliver the aid that is at hand by requesting the presence of a third-party monitor to oversee the distribution, yet these requests have been denied by the JAF.

Health workers in MSF's short-lived mobile clinic reported high rates of malnutrition for children under five³², and the spread of communicable diseases caused by the absence of water and sanitation infrastructure including respiratory infections, diarrhoea, hepatitis³³, and skin diseases. The large presence of pregnant women in the camp—present in an estimated quarter

²⁹ Interview with member of Palmyra Tribal Council 17/2/2017.

³⁰ Apart from exceptional cases.

³¹ It was noted that even the members of the community who carried out the assessment were gaunt and had lost considerable weight. *IRIN* (24 January 2017): "EXCLUSIVE: World Vision rattles aid groups with solo operation for Syrians at Jordan border."

³² *MSF* (8 June 2016): "Syria: Refugees in urgent need of aid and protection on Jordanian border."

³³ Hepatitis is estimated by UNICEF to be the biggest cause of child deaths. Williams, Sara Elizabeth. *The National* (8 December 2016): "Death's waiting room: the ghost refugees trapped at the Syrian-Jordanian border."

of households³⁴—increased complications. Before the opening of a mobile health clinic in February 2017 near the Jordanian berm, a Syrian doctor living in the settlement reported that women who need caesareans were transported to IS-held Tabqa to best access health care, despite the obvious risks³⁵. Further compounding health challenges are a lack of access to medications, available only at exorbitant prices in the market, reportedly coming from Dumayr and IS-held Raqqa and Tabqa³⁶.

While UNICEF and the Jordanian Economic and Social Association of Retired Servicemen and Veteran (ESARVS) and Jordan Health Aid Society (JHAS)³⁷ are providing consultations and basic and emergency reproductive health services as well as vaccinations for children, services are simply not enough to meet the needs in the area. Community health monitors will enter Jordan to receive training in early March³⁸.

The greatest shifts in the Rukban operating environment are the agreement between UN agencies and the Jordanian Armed Forces to move the humanitarian aid distribution point six kilometres into the no-man's land to create a buffer with Jordan's border; and a broader shift to private contractors. The movement of the distribution point away from Jordan's border is considered by some organisations, including Human Rights Watch and ACF, to contravene principles of non-refoulement by forcibly moving populations with the provision of aid³⁹. Ongoing concerns about the area's proximity to the Rukban military base, criminality in the berm area and IS attacks are serving as the justification for the military's consolidation of the humanitarian response under approved contractors, who have military links with the JAF and who have fewer protection and IHL complaints and do not advocate for greater access to beneficiaries. The loss of security provided by the border could cause a greater number of Syrians to ask to be returned into Syria via the Western border, of which some detained individuals have apparently taken.

³⁴ Pregnancy rates were quoted in *Vice* to be close to 7% of the berm population –more than twice the average of a typical community. Williams, Sara Elizabeth. *Vice Broadly* (31 May 2016): "I Thought I Was Going to Die': Syrian Refugees on Giving Birth in the Desert."

³⁵ *Syria: direct* (10 October 2016): "In desert camp along Jordan border, doctor says 'sick patients are more likely to die than get better.'"

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ UNHCR (November 2016): "Jordan Refugee Response: Resuming life-saving assistance at the berm."

³⁸ UNHCR update Border Group 22/2/2017.

³⁹ HRW also considers the legal border between Syria and Jordan to cut directly between the Syrian and Jordan mounds of dirt, or berms. Suggesting that many shelters in Hadalat and Rukban clustering around the southern Jordan berm could technically already be within Jordanian territory. Nevertheless, the politicised nature of the refugee crisis and the government's fortification of the southern side has created a de facto division. HRW researcher Adam Coogler quoted in Rainey, Venetia. *AlJazeera* (24 December 2016): "Dire conditions for Syrian refugees on Jordan's border."

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT: ONE YEAR SCENARIOS

Following the overview of the political, socioeconomic and humanitarian situation earlier in the report, this section will examine three different scenarios with associated political and security implications and humanitarian impacts. Each scenario aims to provide a differing one-year outlook into the context of Jordan, weaving together hypotheses concerning key drivers in the country to create a cohesive possible outcome, despite high levels of uncertainty.

1. 'Safe zones': same product, new branding, less funding

King Abdullah's efforts to reach out to Russia pay off and Jordan is bestowed the important role of mediating the terms of political negotiations and the following ceasefire on the side of the diminished rebel groups. As part of its efforts, border security from airstrikes is assured under the rubric of safe zones, and Amman faces less pressure regarding issues of refoulement. This also allows the US to devolve its increased military funding and decreased humanitarian aid into the same rubric, more closely aligning with its security goals. Nevertheless, it is impossible to completely control rebel groups backed by the kingdom in the conflict, who continue to fight among themselves for patronage and dominance. Their own legitimacy is threatened by Syrian government forces taking Dara'a from the Southern Front, causing some rebel forces to join al-Qaeda and IS affiliates in the area against the Syrian Arab Army and in the long-term discrediting the position of the moderate opposition.

Instability and criminality in the border area weakens their ability to unite against the shared threat of IS as operations in Mosul and Raqqa intensify. Humanitarian access is coordinated under government-allied actors, reducing the space for INGOs and local organizations. Nevertheless, ongoing violence prevents approved actors from an organized response. There is no pressure on the kingdom to change its border policies or adhere to standards of IHL or IHRL regarding the forced movement of refugees. Negotiated political settlement decreases the likelihood of Syrian government or allied airstrikes, suggesting that population at the berm remains relatively stable.

Security Implications

The risk for IS terror attacks—though likely not a large-scale offensive—in addition to intra-rebel group conflict increases substantially as groups vie to dominate the no-man's land and smaller tribal-based security structures gain in importance. Hadalat is also not immune to

Indicators

- Continuation of high-level meetings between Jordan and Russia/ US/ Turkey
- Talk of safe zones provides diplomatic cover for Jordan's border policy
- Humanitarian response carried out by JAF allies and militarised forces
- Militarised allies open charitable organisations
- Tribal Army increasingly at odds with Daraa rebels but remains supported by Jordan
- IS attacks at the berm continue
- Instability in berm region and its environs increases or stays the same
- Berm residents protest military

this deterioration in cohesion as communities begin to migrate to the perceived safer of the two settlements, attracting crime with them.

Humanitarian Consequences

Aid continues to be fought over by military allies and groups affiliated with tribes present in the berm. Organisations receiving funding from UN agencies face a crisis caused by the US budget decrease in aid, compounded by decreasing space and a harder position to advocate from regarding access to beneficiaries and protection issues in the berm. Nevertheless, insecurity leads to regularised closure of humanitarian access, and subsequent negotiations with tribal factions and armed groups continue to impede coordination over distributions, altogether decreasing opportunities for healthcare particularly for children and pregnant mothers and increasing rates of malnutrition. Deteriorating trust in the Tribal Army and associated contractors decreases access or alternately brings in other actors to the field, causing greater conflict. The issue of WASH is handed over to tribal factions to rehabilitate boreholes in the berm area and use a water source captured by the Tribal Army on the border with Sweida. Numbers in the berm area increase with the continuing IS operations but their displacement from IS-held areas is mostly contained by the coalition during the first several months in their localities. Those that reach the berm mostly fall under existing tribal structures.

2. Militarized Camp

Trust-building measures attached to negotiations between different parties to the conflict begin to meet some success in the South. Rebel groups allied with al-Qaeda affiliates in Dara'a are targeted by government-allied forces, weakening the Southern Free Syrian Army but strengthening Jordan's loyal proxy militias. With support from the US and pro-Syrian government actors, safe zones within Syria lead to complete coordination of the camp as a buffer zone and transit area for returning Syrian refugees—an issue increasingly pressing as tensions against Syrians in Jordan worsen in the face of austerity measures and the decrease in subsidies.

Economically pressured to normalise relations with the Syrian government, Jordan continues to use Southern Front FSA groups as a border proxy that manage the refugee populations while continuing to face off against IS—mostly locked in urban warfare in Mosul and Raqqa though small amounts of displacement reach Jordan's borders. With a

actors and movement of distribution point into unstable area further from Jordanian Border Patrol.

- US budget cuts UN funding, but attempts to direct some humanitarian aid through military mechanisms and bilateral support.

Indicators

- Pressures on INGOs to work with security or partners with sub-contracted security
- Interlocking of berm and south Syria dynamics and actors, leading to targeting of Jordan proxies by other rebel groups in addition to IS

mobilised push by the government to rehabilitate Palmyra and its environs, some berm residents begin to leave, decreasing numbers. Displacement camps welcoming Syrian refugees fleeing along the Mosul Raqqa route are established in Palmyra's environs with the coordination of pro-Jordanian factions. This de-escalates some of the violence in the berm area, particularly as the government allows UNHCR to register refugees and de-conflicts the context of militias in and around the berm, if not at least temporarily.

Security Implications

The security context at the border remains unstable due to the impact of new migration from IS-held areas, and the shift of power between rebel groups in Dara'a that are and are not fighting against the government. This dynamic begins to play out in the berm area, further exacerbated by competition over smuggling routes. The potential impact of this competition on the broader tensions between the Jordanian military and intelligence could lead to poor coordination. INGOs and UN agencies depending on this access are powerless to advocate for humanitarian access.

Humanitarian Consequences

Access to beneficiaries by armed factions improves at the expense of humanitarian access; however, space opens for local NGOs and organizers known to Jordanian authorities to implement projects privately and without international scrutiny. New protection issues emerge with the processing and detention of displaced persons coming from recently-liberated areas and the establishment of something akin to a safe zone leaves the handling of this matter to Jordanian authorities, who formalise and control the limited oversight that UN agencies receive. Border access and negotiations are halted as the government militarises the southern borders and increases activities with Western partners. As aid apart from water ceases, certain berm tribal elements protest by causing conflict directed at the border, NGOs and other tribal and civilian groups. Incidents of malnutrition and preventable child and maternal deaths increase.

3. New influx shines spotlight on the border once more

The lack of a negotiated diplomatic settlement, worsening infighting between rebel groups and the government push to take all rebel-held territories in the Syrian theatre causes renews airstrikes particularly in

- Renewed discussions around the establishment of a safe zone, under terms that would operate like a closed, Jordan-managed camp-like setting
- Space for UNHCR and UNICEF to register, conduct limited needs assessments
- Increasing space for limited types of interventions that decrease security threats in berm areas
- Establishment of NGOs by Rakan Khdeir and others

Indicators

- As battle wears on, final pushes for Rural Damascus, Homs

the district of Rural Damascus, Hama and Homs. Saudi Arabia and Qatar ramp up support for opposition groups, who begin to fight against US-supported rebel groups disempowered by a shifting and unstable US strategy. Their willingness to work alongside more radical groups potentially allying with al-Qaeda affiliates put them at odds with Amman, attracts formerly US factions and creates a growing threat to the kingdom. This, alongside a poorly coordinated response to civilians fleeing IS rule in Raqqa and its environs sends thousands streaming south to the berm area once more, putting the Jordanian government in the tough position of condemning attacks committed by its new ally along a border increasingly difficult to protect. As well as leaving the kingdom unprepared to deal with the increased population at the border, the need to assess the potential security threats within the community cause disagreements between the military and intelligence sectors that lead to a weak response to a local terror threat, undermining Jordanian confidence and leading to protests, alongside the impact of IMF reforms.

Remote border management continues to cause huge logistical challenges to the state by investing in opportunistic actors, and failing to deal with the mounting and still-present root of the problem. Local militias are empowered to secure the area and continue to exploit asylum seekers and the humanitarian community attempting to intervene, while increasingly engaging in intra-group conflict. With concerns about IS cells at the border, fortification occurs, but no humanitarian response to match the increasing numbers. The presence of jihadist factions among impotent FSA forces shifts the dynamics away from cooperation.

Security Implications

The security context at the border deteriorates and disempowers Jordanian forces, who had previously put a disproportionate amount of trust in the hands of Syrian militias who are unprepared and unwilling to properly engage with the IS threat, and whose loyalty lies with the best offer. The renewed support of other anti-Assad actors from the Gulf offset Jordan and the US' program of counter-terrorism in a desperate final attempt to overthrow the government, empowering groups whose ideologies the kingdom would like to suppress. This leads to greater uncertainty in southern Syria and a challenge against extremist ideologies in the longer term.

Humanitarian Consequences

The prevention of INGOs from accessing beneficiaries along the berm combined with a substantial influx of more displaced persons will be too

and Hama governorates lead to unguided munitions strikes that cause displacement towards the Jordanian border

- Mixed displacement from IS-held areas and rebel held areas create conflict between groups and possibility of IS attacks in the settlement increase
- Poor coordination between government authorities hinders efficient responses to local extremist cells and increase casualties
- Protests against the government increase
- Informally actors acknowledge is not reaching targeted recipients
- Clashes between armed groups continue in the berm area.

great of a challenge for military-allied actors to handle. This could re-introduce the need for INGOs but will not dramatically improve their ability to advocate on protection issues, which will be the greatest challenge confronting newly-displaced Syrians fleeing from IS-held areas towards likely detention camps, and communities possibly hostile, suspicious or exploitative of the new arrivals. IS cells are a growing threat within communities of asylum seekers, particularly those managed by Jordan's proxies, as the terrorist group cedes territory. Nevertheless, intra and inter-militia and tribal fighting is the greatest risk to security.

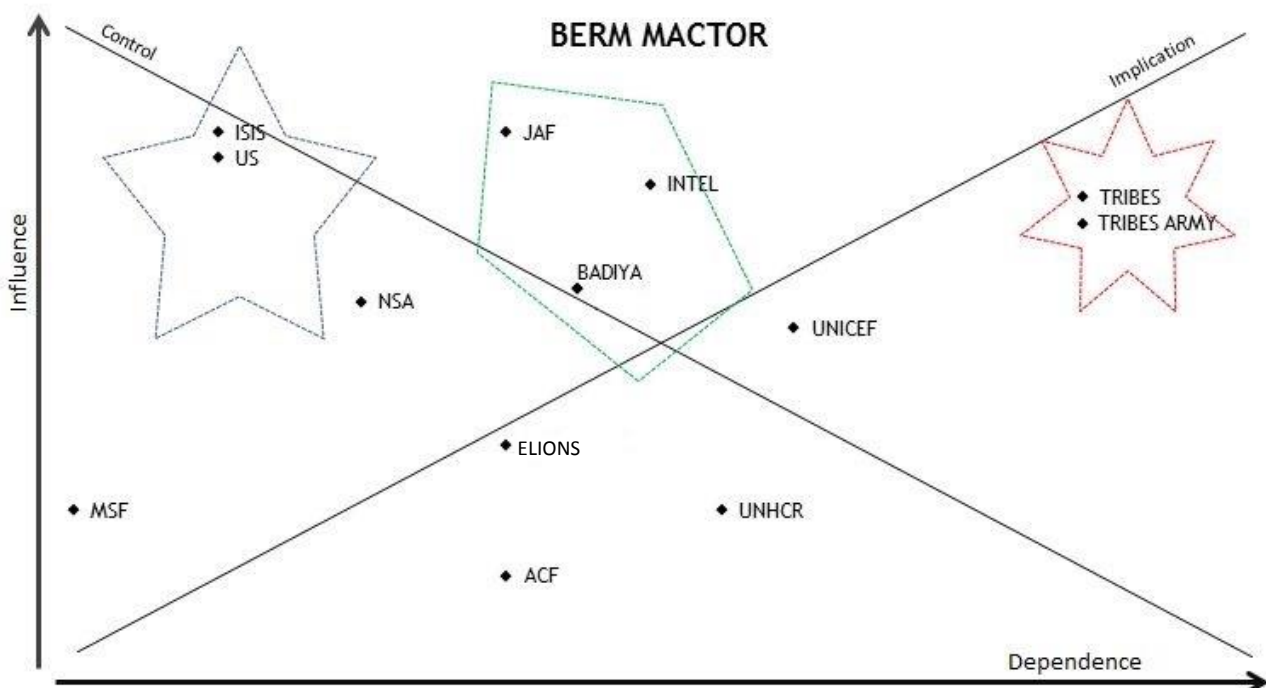
ACTOR MAPPING

Actor mapping was conducted through the qualitative MACTOR tool⁴⁰ to examine the balance of power between stakeholders indirectly and directly involved in the berm context. The findings allow ACF to determine which actors could be potential intermediaries for the organisation to reach its goals. The actors in the upper-left independent and influential 'king-maker' quadrant of the system—the United States and the Islamic State—reflect the influence of the US as the key funder of the Jordanian military and intelligence sectors in guiding Jordan's security policy in the berm. Little impact is had on the country due to distance and the relatively low featuring of Jordanian dynamics on US policy. The Islamic State is also considered to be influential and independent in this context because it represents not only an organisation, but a way of thinking that is disembodied from the group's territories in Iraq and Syria but can still result in destructive terrorist attacks. In the upper-right quadrant of influence and dependency, or the 'queens'—are tribal groups within the berm and the Tribal Army. Both actors are still dependent on the Kings—the US and the Islamic State—in the system, but they also have a considerable amount of influence on the dynamics. In the middle are the intermediaries or the 'bishops', who act between the kings and queens and have a highly flexible role depending on their objectives. Along the line of control is the Revolutionary Commandos, formerly known as the New Syrian Army, which takes direct orders from the United States CIA as a funded militia. These actors include the Jordanian Armed Forces, intelligence authorities and Badiya. Further below these actors, who are less influential and relatively dependent, is ACF, the Eastern Lions Brigade, UNHCR and MSF.

Many of the actors outside of the humanitarian sector (and some of those within it) who have access to the berm area have overlapping security, governmental, military, kinship and commercial interests and ties—and have perhaps compromised neutrality for the humanitarian imperative of accessing this space through security contractors—which has been a prerequisite of the Jordanian Armed Forces. These relations ineluctably bond the actors together through a closing and complex web of mutual complicity and participation. Operating in this context, and

⁴⁰ First developed in 1989-90 by François Bourse and Michel Godet as part of a strategic foresight toolkit. For more information, consult [La Prospective: Mactor](#).

particularly around Rukban—requires the consent of a significant part of this web. Permissions directed towards the Jordanian Armed Forces pass directly and indirectly towards western military actors, and primarily the US forces and their contractors, intelligence officials, and local and Syrian actors in their personal, commercial and tribal networks, which are often overlapping. While this system can appear opaque, unethical and oftentimes highly chaotic, it clearly prioritises a security-first agenda overseen by interconnected familial and tribal networks (on both sides of the border) that isolate humanitarian actors who critique their agenda.



Within this insulated militarized context, there are internal divisions that reveal competition over power between the military and the intelligence sectors, particularly as members of the security services have caused numerous breaches in Jordan’s security, illegally trafficking US weapons to extremists, allowing for breaks in protocol regarding returning Jordanians who had participated in radical jihadist groups in Syria, and in general preferring tribal over state ties. This has arguably caused the intelligence sector—which has witnessed numerous personnel changes in the berm area during recent months—to act on the offensive, reaching out and supporting elements within the berm who oppose the JAF-supported Tribal Army, namely the Palmyra Tribal Council which represents the majority of tribes in Rukban. Destabilizing the Tribal Army could also be a strategy to prevent one group from dominating and exploiting displaced persons at the berm, whereby numerous groups claim to be supported by factions within the Jordanian state infrastructure, and are moving blindly against one another. For humanitarian actors, the willingness for the Jordanian government and UN agencies to allow partnering NGOs to be replaced by private contractors represents a significant loss of humanitarian principles, drastically weakening the position of organisations to negotiate for access vis-à-vis technical capacity. At the same time, NGOs have been unwilling to risk working

in the berm area due to insecurity and government restrictions. The key factor that could alter this dynamic would be the discrediting of contracting organizations as a destabilizing factor, which has arguably already begun.

Regional Actors

The US government has traditionally considered Jordan a cornerstone of its Middle East foreign policy agenda, but the Trump administration's desire to redirect diplomatic and humanitarian funding towards military spending could have a massive impact on Jordan. Even if resources were redirected towards security, refugee response resources are instrumental to the kingdom's stability. Funding would decrease to UN agencies like UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. In exchange for substantial economic and military assistance⁴¹, the kingdom home to a population of an estimated 1.3 million Syrian refugees hosts the US military as a partner in the anti-IS coalition and maintains friendly relations with Israel. Yet President Trump's unpredictable policy positions have pressured dependent Amman. While difficult to assess, it is likely that the US will decrease financial aid, raising military investment towards counterterrorism and decreasing funding to Syrian rebel groups, short-term adventurism possibly involving a troop surge combined with support for Israel causing the risky move of the Israeli capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—a huge regional destabilizer.

Domestically, the government has already introduced a raft of taxes⁴² that put tremendous pressure on the local population. A toxic cocktail of reduced aid and Israeli political aggression in a country with a majority Palestinian population could prove fatal. Such predictions have caused King Abdullah to reach out to the US, and its far stronger regional powerbroker Russia to hold bilateral meetings and warn of the need to maintain security of Jordan and its borders.

Safe zones have been mentioned by both governments to preserve Jordan's territorial integrity, allowing the state to use the border population of around 85,000 Syrians as a civilian buffer. The presence of Islamic State elements nearby and the ongoing military operations in the area suggest that any sort of zone would require protection by an armed actor, likely similar to the militias funded by Jordan and the MOC, which includes the US. Jordan arguably already has a tacit agreement of the sort.

The **UK government** has similar objectives to its US counterpart, particularly following the Brexit referendum which is directing foreign aid towards Britain's economic and security interests—Jordan chief among them. In preparation to leave the European Union, Jordan could also experience a loss in development and foreign aid from London, but military aid would similarly remain untouched.

⁴¹ Assistance amounted to 1.6 billion dollars in 2016. Sharif, Osama. *Al-Monitor* (7 February 2017): "Why king's visit to Washington was essential for Jordan."

⁴² The Jordanian government hopes to raise an additional 643 million dollars in taxes and tariffs.

Government Actors

The Jordanian Armed Forces have the highest jurisdiction over Jordan's border security and coordinate the Border Guard Force to secure the berm area. Following the 21 June bombing, JAF and BGF positions were filled by members of the Bani Khaled tribe to better coordinate with Bani Khaled members in the berm area. Any element of humanitarian intervention—from the use of private security contractors through the tribal army, to monitors appointed to conduct needs assessments—are chosen through the JAF. These positions likely form part of the army's network of eyes on the ground in the lawless region. The JAF has been empowered in the last year by the highest levels of government to counter the perceived corruption of the intelligence community, which is hindering the fight against terrorism at the local level—as seen by the Karak incident. However, JAF's support of the Tribal Army has amounted in further chaos, allowing the intelligence sector to increase its support of tribal elements in the berm. The most recent addition to the Jordanian berm is the mobile clinic operated by Jordan Health Aid Society (JHAS) and the Economic and Social Association of Retired Servicemen and Veterans (ESARVS)⁴³—both groups are made of former military doctors.

Border Guards at the berm consist predominantly of the eastern Badiya tribal groups present on the other side of the border, and are overseen by the Jordanian Armed Forces. Coordinating with the Tribal Army and its associated private contractors present in the area, their priorities are security objectives over humanitarian ones.

Military Intelligence has a competitive relationship with the military at the local and national levels. A report in the New York Times in September 2016 about the sale of US-funded weapons by officials in the intelligence to individuals who later carried out jihadist attacks on US soldiers in Jordan has been followed by more recent accusations of the compromise of the agency to internal jihadist threats relating to its tribal and kinship affiliations. As a result the government has been pressured by its Western allies to decrease dependence on the sector. This has led to several high-level staff changes of members of the intelligence sector at the berm, which is causing the agency to respond by more forcefully supporting disparate elements who contradict the JAF proxy Tribal Army. These elements have begun to contest one another's power and positioning and will destabilise the kingdom's ability to respond to local extremist threats.

Armed Groups

The Tribal Army is led by **Sheikh Rakan Khdeir**, a businessman who hails from Dara'a and enjoys close ties to the Armed Forces. He oversees the force created by the Jordanians with the support of the US military, who pay salaries and supply weapons to approximately 130 soldiers to defend Jordan's border from the Islamic State. The group has fought IS in Lajat, eastern

⁴³ [UNHCR](#) (1 March 2017): "Jordan Refugee Response: Providing life-saving assistance at the berm – 1 March 2017."

Dara'a^{44,45}. With the support of the JAF the militia also played an instrumental role in the provision of security for humanitarian actors of the berm, though the significant financial resources the militia receives through UN agencies and others and its allegiance with the JAF has led it to be the target of attacks from Islamic State and other militias. Further causing ire in the berm are allegations that the forces who hail from Dara'a, rather than eastern Syria like the majority of IDPs, have stolen and sold on a significant proportion of aid. This has led to the subtle repositioning of the army outside of the camp extending only along Jordan's borders.

The entrepreneurial Rakan, however, is attempting to compete with the berm's civil and humanitarian institutions by establishing his own NGO, Mu'assisat Rakan, and a civil court parallel to a court established in February by civil administrators. Despite his lack of legitimacy in the berm area, as a Jordanian government proxy, he has appeared as a party to the Astana talks representing the FSA—likely explaining the presence of the Tribal Army from Rukban to Dara'a, barring a small Syrian Arab Army position in Sweida. Its recent operations to take a lake along the governorate borders between Sweida and Dara'a suggest their ambition to become a legitimate force controlling this key smuggling route between the border, Damascus and Homs. Such a strong showing of Jordan's ally also suggests the exaggerated role the country will play in "moderate" rebel-supported peace talks—as classified by Syrian government allies. It is likely that the Southern Front forces who have not engaged against Assad forces due to MOC commands will be given an inflated position in any future transitional government.

To the east of the camp, the **Revolutionary Commando Army** under Captain Abdullah al-Zoubi⁴⁶ and the MOC are the most recent manifestation of the CIA-backed force conducting IS raids to the east of Rukban, formerly known as the New Syrian Army. In July an unsuccessful operation to take the AlBukamal forward operating base led to conflict that would lead to the group's renaming. In addition to a military base on the Jordan side south-east of the berm, the group had an office within Rukban, and elements of the mostly Dara'a-based soldiers (with strong links to members of the JAF) were accused of being involved in conflict with local security elements to take a cut of the lucrative trade of humanitarian goods and others, and have engaged with the Tribal Army. Since January, the army has not been allowed to have an office in the camp.

The Eastern Lions brigade comes predominantly from Deir Ezzor tribe al-Sheitat, of whom approximately 700 members were massacred by the Islamic State in 2014. Following the August massacre tribal members joined a US and Jordan-backed fight against IS and have been active in the Qalamoun mountains through the MOC⁴⁷. The Lions have become increasingly present in berm dynamics, clashing with the Tribal Army from mid-2016 and in February setting up a base

⁴⁴ *IRIN* (24 January 2017): "EXCLUSIVE: World Vision rattles aid groups with solo operation for Syrians at Jordan border."

⁴⁵ *SYRIA: direct* (19 October 2016): "Trapped in desert between Syria and Jordan, thousands of displaced fear total isolation after suicide attack."

⁴⁶ Some remnants regrouped after internal disputes- likely caused by the need to continue to secure CIA funding (*Maghaweer al-Thawra*). *Shaan* (22 December 2016): "Maghaweer al-Thawra tashkeel bida'am amreeky limuhariba tantheem aldawla fi Homs (trans: *Revolutionary Commandos: forming with American support to fight the Islamic State in Homs*)."

⁴⁷ *Middle East Eye* (25 September 2015): "Who are the pro-Assad militias in Syria?"

150 meters from the Rukban distribution point, continuing to clash with the army and participating alongside their fellow tribesmen in Rukban to set up court and civil administration functions.

The Islamic State has boasted a presence along Jordan's border in two places: the north-eastern Badiya desert region where Iraq, Syria and Jordan meet; and north of Jordan's north-western border with Israel, where factions mobilised by the US train and equip program radicalised. In the Badiya, IS has tried to maintain strategic trade and offensive positions near Tanf and Albukamal near to the Syrian border and has remained a potent fighting force against MOC and CIA-backed militia groups. The likelihood of growing IS presence at the border is supported by moving offensive lines in Iraq and Syria. The only direction for fleeing troops to move is southwards, into the no-man's land berm settlement. Since the 21 June VBIED attack which killed seven border guards, IS attacks have increased, particularly between October 2016 and January 2017. Most attacks have targeted Tribal Army checkpoints.

Tribal Groups of the Badiya have been a key organising element for Berm civilians, providing security and political representation for the constituent communities in the face of lawlessness. Larger groups with kinship affiliations in Jordan are also financially benefiting from the large population on the border, smuggling food, weapons, fuel, medicines and people across Syria into and out of rebel, IS and government-held areas. Within the Rukban population Badiya tribe Al-Umour was blamed for creating instability and profiting the most for the illegal trade of goods, yet it would be false to assume their absence would bring stability to the camp. Part of the reason for the empowerment of the Tribal Army is the little tribal links that group has to the local population, and to the border guards. The Dara'a tribe is therefore completely dependent on the Jordanian government and considered external to the population it is charged with overseeing. The Palmyra Tribal Council representing 12 tribes from the Badiya has combatted the power of the Tribal Army and its monopoly over trade and security. In the last six months they have been empowered to provide security in the camp due to the ineffective Tribal Army, and have advocated for a more direct role in the distribution, successfully pressuring humanitarian actors to distribute aid to heads of tribes, rather than households, to maintain their authority. Tribes have also been allowed to carry their own arms within the camp following the June bombing—something the Army can no longer do⁴⁸.

Humanitarian Aid Providers

UN agencies face a substantial threat of a loss of US funding pushed by the Trump administration to cut 29% of the State Department's funding, of which the UN falls under. The US contributes 594 million to the UN regular budget and 2.3 billion for peacekeeping, amounting to 22% of the regular budget and 29% of the peacekeeping budget⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ *IRIN* (9 June 2016): "Syrians trapped in desert no man's land."

⁴⁹ *Fox News* (16 March 2017): "Trump's proposed budget seeks major cuts to UN programs."

UNICEF has been operating in health, WASH, nutrition and delivery of winter kits and educational supplies in the berm area and is seen as a key negotiator with the JAF over humanitarian space, allowing for small openings of access alongside WFP and UNHCR.

UNHCR's registration of asylum seekers at the berm was halted by the JAF post-June. Registration was to issue assistance cards to orderly target distribution of assistance. Today, a private charity associated with a former staff member of **World Vision** is independently registering individuals in Hadalat area as a private consultant.

WFP works alongside UNICEF and IOM in the nutrition sector⁵⁰. The first distribution after the June bombing was in August, when food was delivered by crane to bypass government restrictions. The agency has been unable to regularly maintain monthly distributions between November and January due to instability at the distribution point, and the increasing and exorbitant cost of security from the Tribal Army.

World Vision was the only INGO working inside of the berm after the June bombing, through Badia and the Tribal Army. The organisation has been heavily criticised by other humanitarian actors for choosing access over humanitarian principles, and has had to deal with the consequences of the targeting of the Tribal Army, when the WV warehouse was burned down in the berm area alongside an IS attack targeting Tribal Army staff. The country director and their deputy resigned during the last few months.

Western donors are being requested to fund a \$39 million package of humanitarian measures⁵¹ of which, according to a draft seen by IRIN, \$26 million is security-related, including a \$20 million road between Karama and Rukban, \$5.1 million on new border posts and \$1 million to reinforce the temporary service area. A community health centre will also be built. Additional donor funding will be directed towards watchtowers, allowances for security and armoured vehicles.

CONCLUSION

As the war in Syria enters its seventh year, compounded waves of displacement contribute to the insecurity and needs of asylum seekers. At the berm, the 85,000 people seeking protection from government-led airstrikes are considered more so as bystanders to the military operations occurring north and east of the community that are being carried out by a number of state militaries and contractors. Particularly with operations to liberate the city of Raqqa underway, space for international humanitarian actors is closing as the government consolidates interventions through proxy militias fulfilling border security and intelligence services among the berm population before a humanitarian one. This period is the most crucial for maintaining humanitarian access, with the possibility of an influx of asylum seekers and greater threats to

⁵⁰ The IOM halted bread distribution during the summer of 2016.

⁵¹ *IRIN* (7 October 2016): "The "buffer zone" plan for 70,000 stranded Syrian refugees."

security. For INGO actors, international pressure to maintain Jordan's stability will cause a greater portion of humanitarian aid to be redirected internally to best benefit host communities, while encouraging returns among the Syrian population as the situation stabilises.

Jordan and the Berm

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