

# INTERVIEW WITH JORDAN'S KING ABDULLAH II



*Special Operations Report Editor-in-Chief Samuel M. Katz interviews King Abdullah II at the royal residence in Amman.*

**B**orn in Amman on January 30, 1962, King Abdullah II is the eldest son of the late King Hussein and Princess Muna Al Hussein. He began his primary education at the Islamic Educational College in Amman and later attended St. Edmund's School in Surrey, England. For his secondary education, he attended Eaglebrook School and Deerfield Academy in the U.S.A. He entered the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (U.K.) in 1980 and was commissioned as second Lieutenant in spring of 81. He then served as a Reconnaissance Troop Leader in the 13/18th Royal Hussars Regiment (British Army) in the U.K. (and West Germany). From 1985 to 1993 he served mainly in the Armored Corps (3<sup>rd</sup> Division) in all related command appointments at platoon, company and as battalion second in command positions, until finally commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Battalion, 40<sup>th</sup>

Armored Brigade with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel from January 1992 to January 1993. During this period he attended several military courses in the U.S. and the U.K. including Staff College Camberley (U.K.) 1990-1991. He also has several attachments to the Special Forces and a year as a tactics instructor with Jordan Army's Antitank, Cobra Helicopter Wing. In 1993 he was appointed as the Deputy Commander of Jordanian Special Forces and took full command of Jordan's special operations forces in November 1993. He commanded these forces till October 1996, when he was instructed to reorganize this and other elite units into the Special Operations Command (SOCCOM). In 1998, as SOCCOM Commander, he was promoted to the rank of Major General and continued this command until the passing away of King Hussein in February 1999.

**Your Majesty, what is the significance of Special Forces in Jordan's military history and what role do they play today in the defense of the country?**

Our Special Forces have always been an elite arm, similar to those in other countries, but in recent years we've seen a transformation from classic Special Forces to providing a variety of options to Jordan's leadership whether it is internal or border security. I think what we have achieved in our Special Forces/Special Operations is the ability to continue to adapt to the threat. The threat that we looked at years ago is different than the threat today, and could be different again in 10 years time. Special Forces are probably the most flexible tool that allows us to not only defend our country but to adapt to the tactics of the enemy.

**To follow up, what would you say are some of the evolving tactics that Special Forces are uniquely adept at?**

Obliviously counterterrorism has been one that continues to develop in tactics and technology. If you look at the makeup of Special Operations, there are now units and capabilities that were never there before, such as creating a sniper/reconnaissance asset which is something unique to our Armed Forces. This capability has been identified as being a more important role in today's type of warfare. The ability of having dedicated air assets to Special Forces/Special Operations has transformed our military, although having said that, we still have to practice the classic Special Forces skills. You never know; historically, when you give up one skill set because you think that you'll never use it again and then you suddenly realize that it's very applicable in another conflict. There was a thought process that tanks were being phased out from the battlefield but looking now at urban warfare, there is a role for heavy armor to support infantry. Overall, I think you have to be not so much a Jack of all trades, but a Master of all trades and I think getting the balance right is the challenge for all leaders that develop the tactics and strategies for Special Forces.

**Jordan sits in a dangerous neighborhood, can you please talk about some of the threats that Jordan faces and the role of Special Forces in defeating those threats?**

Over the past several years the international community has had to come together in the fight against international terror and therefore we've had to ensure our capabilities can meet these threats. Years ago the challenge was border security, I think that those are still applicable to some extent but today counterterrorism plays a much larger role.



**Overall, what has been the role of Special Forces in the Global War on Terror?**

We have seen many examples of Special Forces being used. Afghanistan is a prime example of where small teams were deployed to conduct classic special operations and winning the hearts and minds within communities and furthering their own capabilities to combat the enemy and creating islands of stability. There is also the issue of interdiction missions, reconnaissance and keeping the pressure on the enemy. In principle, the rules of special operations have not changed, the basics have remained the same, we have just had to adapt to being more efficient.

**How difficult is it for Special Forces, from both a command and an operator level, to always remain on the offensive?**

Maintaining our edge is the number one challenge we face. The enemy, after all, has the luxury to pick the time and place of their attacks and therefore maintaining vigilance so that you can react to events is a challenge that every commander has. Special Forces cannot fall behind the times, they have to rely upon classic Special Forces training and keep pushing the envelope and identifying their weaknesses. For example, what I see in the United States and in other countries around the world are units adapting and changing their tactics to anticipate new threats.

**What impact has the war in Iraq had on Special Forces and how has that conflict impacted the counterterrorism philosophy here in Jordan?**

We looked at internal security several years ago as being a top priority for our Special Forces and we identified the importance of operations in built-up areas. If you look at the immediate lessons learned, such as snipers playing a more active role in counterinsurgency operations, we reacted by creating a new sniper/reconnaissance asset and a designated marksman program. In urban operations, we also looked at methods of entry and the development of light up-armored and more cost effective vehicles to support operations in built-up areas. We have several projects in the pipeline with KADDB (King Abdullah Design and Development Bureau) focusing on enhancing our capabilities to operate in built-up areas, such as upgrading equipment and weapons that were put into stores and thought of as obsolete, but could now have a role in supporting Special Forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations.

**What overall lessons can the global family of special operations units learn from conflicts in Iraq, Darfur and elsewhere?**

Special Forces must be very flexible in taking the lessons learned in one conflict and not setting them in stone in a future conflict. Where



**(Top): King Abdullah reviews an honor guard before opening the new session of parliament in Amman.**

**(Bottom): Counterterrorist operators from SOU 71 stand on alert near Amman.**

the enemy shares information on its opponents' tactics and weaknesses, we in turn should share information on procedures, tactics and battle lessons learned, especially at the lower level. Logistics, for example, have proven to be a problem, especially in Afghanistan where it is a challenge to get equipment and supplies to troops on the ground. If you look at the Iraq conflict, weapons that may have been used by coalition forces at the onset of the conflict are not necessarily being used in the same way today. Operators have taken equipment they possess and developed tactics around those

tools to support the men going through the door more effectively and efficiently. We are seeing a much larger use of aerial observation assets and UAVs as an ability of getting real-time intelligence to soldiers on the battlefield.

**Is peace possible in a region such as this, and can it be the soldiers, or more specifically the operators, who spearhead an end to conflicts?**

Peace is always possible. As depressing as sometimes the challenges are, there is the optimism that we have to hold on to at the end of the day. After all, we are human beings and we want security and safety for our families and a better life for those around us. Soldiers are the first people who will tell you that armed conflict is not the only option because they know the immediate price of war. But soldiers will definitely play a role in the peace because they will be the security and backbone of creating the stability that this part of the world needs.

**In addition to its role in the Global War on Terror, Jordan's Special Operation Units have participated in numerous peace-keeping operations in recent years. Why has it been important to participate in these deployments and why, specifically, has it been important to deploy Special Operations Units?**

We are part of the international family and Jordan bears its share of international responsibilities like other countries. Jordan has always wanted to do its share in making the world more safe and



TOP PHOTO: MUHAMMAD HANMED/REUTERS; BOTTOM PHOTO: ALI JAREKI/REUTERS



**(Top):** King Abdullah visits a Special Forces base near Amman.

**(Bottom):** Jordanian peacekeepers march during a medal award ceremony in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

stable. This is why it has one of the higher levels of participation in UN peace-keeping operations around the world. We've also come back with tremendous experiences from these operations, and our troops have come back from these missions as better soldiers. The lessons learned have afforded them an understanding of different cultures and from my own point of view alone, it's been a win-win situation for us. It has been very important for the Special Forces, from my own personal experience, to see if the training doctrine places the soldier in the right frame of mind to take part in such operations. Sierra Leone was a prime example where our Special Forces

engaged in intense combat in support of Jordanian troops deployed as peace-keepers. They saw more than their fair share of engagements and when I asked the soldiers how it was and how they rated it in comparison to training, invariably they said that the training was tougher because of our concentration of using large amounts of live ammunition in preparing them for real combat.

**What traits personify the mettle inside the men who makes up Jordan's tip of the spear?**

The Jordanian soldier is dedicated, he's courageous. I've found that he is tough and able to learn quickly and believes in what he's doing. Whenever we've had difficult missions, I've always checked with my soldiers to see what they feel about the situation and they've always been raring to go. They have never shied away from any of the challenges that have been put before them. I have personally witnessed and it has been reported to me, many acts of courage in operations. I feel comfortable that the Jordanian soldier is someone that I can feel very proud of.

**How important are the tools of the trade to ensuring that operators are equipped to carry out their mission?**

It is the human element that makes the difference and not the equipment, but having said that because I feel so close to our armed forces, we have worked very hard over the last years to make sure that the best equipment is available not only to our special forces but also other units as well. Whether it is their uniforms, their equipment or weapons, we have always tried to get them the



BOTTOM: PHOTOEDUARDO MUNOZ/REUTERS



*(Top): A 61 SRR sniper position.*

*(Bottom): King Abdullah shakes the hand of a 61 SRR recon sniper.*

best equipment possible. When, for example, you look at Jordanian special forces and Jordanian infantry units compared to other countries even at NATO standards, you will see that the equipment they have received is on par if not better than equipment used by some of the best units around the world. As long as a solid training doctrine is present, the equipment and weapons only enhance the operator's capabilities.

**Parachuting and airborne insertions have always been an important element of training for Jordan's Special Forces. What importance do airborne operations have in today's counter-insurgency campaigns?**

We saw in the opening days of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan the use of airborne units in smaller number than we are traditionally used

to seeing. Logistic drops, in particular, are still being used regularly in Afghanistan. The use of the parachute as a method of insertion, be it personnel or hardware, is still a skill required by Special Forces. We are seeing the need to have more accuracy on jumps and on getting supplies to where they are needed. I think that the ever changing threat and the way insurgents move from one area to another requires the ability to insert small groups of Special Forces at greater distances and to keep them re-supplied is something that is vital.

**How important is it for Special Forces of the world to interact and train together and how are these contacts forged here in Jordan?**

It is very important that special operations units interact with one another. There has been a tremendous improvement in good faith since 9/11 among friendly forces to interact but it is still not good enough. I think people are more honest in sharing tactics and capabilities with one another but we have to continue to work on this. It is very easy to step back and say that I will just continue to look after myself but developing contacts and training together is a call that needs to be made continuously.

**Where do you see Jordan's Special Forces a decade from now?**

Jordan's Special Forces will always play a vital role in the make up of our armed forces. I think that the Global War on Terror will take longer than most have expected and the Special Forces will have to continue to the ever changing tactics. ■

