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Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi, 35, confesses on Jordanian state-run television to her failed bid to set off an explosives belt inside one of the three Amman hotels targeted by al-Qaeda (Jordanian TV/AP)

'The woman is a beast' - Jordan's shock at bomber confession

BY SIMON FREEMAN AND AGENCIES

Jordan today reacted with a mixture of horror and incredulity after the televised confession by an Iraqi woman whose explosive vest failed to detonate during suicide attacks in Amman last week.

"The woman is a beast," said Tarek Khourma, whose brother was one of the victims of the three bombs which tore through luxury hotels in the capital on Wednesday.

"But her confession was some sort of relief, a kind of consolation. I know it won't bring my brother back, but it will allow us to direct our anger against someone."

Sajida Mubarak al-Rishawi and her husband walked into the ballroom at the Radisson Hotel intending to blow themselves up during a wedding reception.

She survived the blast and fled, but her husband, Ali Hussein al-Shammari, succeeded in detonating his explosives, killing at least 23 guests, including the bride's father and father-in-law, after the couple

Al-Rishawi was arrested yesterday at a safehouse, still in possession of the faulty explosive vest. Showing no emotion, she recounted how she and al-Shammari entered Jordan on fake Iraqi passports and four days later went to the Radisson SAS hotel.

"He managed to blow himself up, I tried but I could not. I saw the people run and flee

the hotel and ran out just like them," she said.

Wearing a white Muslim headscarf and a black-coat, she was calm, composed and showed no sign of remorse. At one point she [lifted her black denim jacket](#) to reveal the explosives belt.

The three-minute confession on state television brought a mixture of relief, anger and shock. It was, however, not universally believed and there was talk of a government-inspired conspiracy.

"I expected to see a tough-looking combatant, not someone so plain," said Bayan, a Jordanian housewife.

"There's a sense of relief because she's Iraqi and she didn't use a local terrorist cell," said Hamarneh. "When she appeared on the screen, people just exploded in applause."

But not everyone was convinced by the confession. "Nonsense. It is another lie orchestrated by the government to divert our attention from the truth," said one man, who declined to be named.

Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, is due to visit Amman today as part of a tour of the Middle East. Many Jordanians are asking if they were paying the price for the kingdom's close ties with Washington.

"Jordanians and Arabs elsewhere who want to fight against terrorism - and have done so for decades - find themselves in the awkward position of not knowing whether this is best done by supporting or opposing Anglo-American policies in Iraq," write commentator Rami Khouri in the *Jordan Times* newspaper.

But King Abdullah in an interview with CNN over the weekend insisted that the battle is not over political ideology but is instead a struggle between extremist Islam on the one hand and moderates of all faiths and nationalities on the other.

"The struggle we have with al-Qaeda is not an issue of politics, an issue of Jordanian policy. They're out to get everybody ... This is a fight inside Islam. This attack is a strike against the people of Jordan, not the policies of Jordan."

As shock turns to anger, the outward show of solidarity is masking a bout of soul-searching among Jordanians over the kingdom's historical ambivalence towards al-Qaeda.

[Rana Sabbagh-Gargour](#), *Times* Correspondent in Amman, said: "A year ago, 60 per cent of the population said that they supported al-Qaeda and that it was a legitimate resistance against the US occupation of Iraq. Now, after the attacks on their own soil, that figure will certainly be much lower, but it will not have evaporated entirely."

The US military today disclosed that an Iraqi sharing the name of one of the suicide attackers behind the hotel bombings was arrested in Iraq last year and released two weeks later.

Safaa Mohammed Ali, 23, has been named as one of the three Iraqis who struck last Wednesday at the Grand Hyatt, SAS Radisson and Day's Inn hotels in Amman, killing at least 57 people and injuring 100 in the first serious terrorist attacks on Jordanian soil.

A statement by the US command said that an Iraqi by that name was detained in November 2004 in connection with the American assault on the insurgent stronghold of Fallujah. It has not yet been determined whether the person detained was the same man who took part in the Amman attack.

"He was detained locally at the division detention facility but was released two weeks later because there was no compelling evidence to continue to hold him as a threat to the security of Iraq," the statement said.

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