

Beat: Politics

MIDDLE EAST-JORDAN OFFERS RELEASE OF TERRORIST IN EXCHANGE FOR PILOT

AGREEMENT BY JORDANIAN GOVERNMENT

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USPA NEWS - Wednesday, the Jordanian government agreed to release a convicted terrorist in exchange for the freeing of an air force pilot captured by Islamic State militants in Syria a month ago, according to a statement released on Jordanian state television just before a deadline set by the extremists.

The militants had threatened to kill the pilot and a Japanese journalist they are holding hostage if the deadline was not met, according to a video attributed to the Islamic State. The Jordanian statement did not mention of the fate of the journalist, although Japanese officials have said they were working with the Jordanians to try to free the two men.

"Jordan confirms that it is completely prepared to release the prisoner Sajida al-Rishawi if Moaz al-Kasasbeh," the statement said. Jordan's foreign minister, Nasser S. Judeh, said on Twitter, "We've asked for proof of life of our hero al-Kasasbeh, that he's safe and healthy, but we did not get it." The authenticity of the video released Tuesday, has still to be confirmed, but it follows a similar format to one posted over the weekend and claimed by the extremist group. In the video, a man who says he is the Japanese journalist, Kenji Goto, presents the militants' ultimatum, demanding Ms. Rishawi's release in exchange for his own.

Mr. Goto said that both he and the pilot would otherwise be killed, but he did not indicate whether the extremists had also proposed releasing the pilot.

The minister of state for media affairs, Mohammad Momani, "confirmed that the priority of Jordan from the beginning of the crisis was to insure the life of our son the pilot Kasasbeh," state television reported. The father, Youssef al-Kasasbeh, broke weeks of silence, requested by government officials, to make the demand at a demonstration calling for Ms. Rishawi to be exchanged for Lieutenant Kasasbeh.

"Who is Sajida to us?" Mr. Kasasbeh said on Wednesday at a demonstration of several hundred in support of his son. "Sajida is a burden on us, let them release her. I am asking for the release of Sajida and all the prisoners, and the return of Moaz to us." The pilot is the first prisoner from the American-led coalition to have been taken by the Islamic State since the coalition began airstrikes against the militants. Jordan is one of four Arab countries participating in the Syria strikes.

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