

Jordan arrests two journalists on aiding terrorism charges

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New York, January 29, 2015--Jordanian authorities arrested the owner of a local news website and the site's editor-in-chief on Wednesday, accusing the two of aiding terrorism and spreading false news in a report stating that an imprisoned Iraqi militant would be freed in a hostage negotiation deal, according to [news reports](#).

Hashim al-Khalidi, owner of [Saraya News](#), and Seif Obeidat, the website's editor-in-chief, face up to 15 years in prison if convicted, news reports said. They are being held for 14 days in Marka prison, east of Amman, according to local [news sources](#).

On Wednesday, [Saraya News](#) [reported](#) that Sajida al-Rishawi, an Iraqi militant imprisoned in Jordan, would be handed over to an Iraqi tribal leader as part of the negotiation to free Kenji Goto, a Japanese journalist, and save the life of Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kassasbeh, both of whom have been held hostage by the militant group Islamic State.

The Jordanian government denied the allegations made in the [Saraya News](#) report, according to news reports.

In December, Jordan's attorney general forbade media organizations from republishing statements by Islamic State in connection with the hostage negotiation, according to [local new reports](#).

A Jordanian prosecutor also accused al-Khalidi and Obeidat of using the media to "propagate the ideas of a terrorist organization." The two face charges under the country's 2006 anti-terrorism law and its amendments, according to [news reports](#). In May 2014, Jordanian authorities passed amendments that expand the definition of terrorism to include "acts that would subject the kingdom to hostile acts, or harm its relations with a foreign country."

In a [statement](#) published on other news websites today, [Saraya News](#) denied that they had aided terrorism and denied that their story was false, saying they had used the same source that other news outlets had used. The statement also called for the release of al-Khalidi and Obeidat.

"The use of over-broad anti-terrorism statutes to muzzle reporting is deeply troubling," said Sherif Mansour, CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. "We call on Jordanian authorities to release both men immediately and allow their news site to operate freely."

The prosecutor also ordered [Saraya News](#) to be shut down, according to [local reports](#). It is unclear if the staff complied with the order. CPJ was able to access the website early Thursday, but the website showed no public posts after 9 p.m. Wednesday, Jordanian time.

The Islamic State issued a warning today, saying it would kill Jordanian pilot al-Kassasbeh if al-Khalidi was not handed over at the Turkish border at sunset, according to a [report](#) by Agence France-Presse. Jordanian government spokesman Mohammad al-Momani said Jordanian authorities were waiting for evidence that the al-Kassasbeh was alive, the reports said. The proposed swap included Japanese journalist [Goto](#), according to [news reports](#), but al-Momani made no mention of Goto, the AFP report said.

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