

Jordan prince told to stop “destabilising activities” after more than a dozen arrests

Jean Shaoul
5 April 2021

In an unprecedented move, Jordan’s foreign minister Ayman Safadi has accused Prince Hamza, the former crown prince and half-brother of King Abdullah, of plotting with foreign and local parties to destabilise the country.

The details are far from clear as the Jordanian authorities have released little information. Hamza is believed to be under house arrest, although officials deny this, while 14 to 16 former insiders have been arrested. According to the government-controlled Petra News Agency, all who were “arrested, among others, for security reasons” were unnamed except for Sharif Hassan bin Zaid and Bassem Awadallah.

Hamza, the 40-year-old son of the late King Hussein and his fourth wife Noor, attended an elite school in Britain before going on for military training at Sandhurst. Designated Abdullah’s successor until 2004, and then largely sidelined, Hamza has caused tensions within the palace by forging links with disaffected members of Jordan’s powerful tribes, the East Bankers, who form the bedrock of support for the monarchy and feel marginalised by the presence of the West Bankers, the Palestinians displaced by Israel in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948-49 and 1967.

On Saturday afternoon, after the Jordanian Armed Forces chief of staff visited Hamza at his home to give him an official warning to stop his “destabilising activities,” the BBC published a video of Hamza, passed on by his lawyer, in which he denied being part of any “conspiracy or nefarious organisation or foreign-backed group.”

In the video, Hamza claimed he had been placed under house arrest, with his telephone and internet connections cut, as part of a crackdown on critics. He lambasted the ruling elite in very general terms for its rampant corruption and nepotism, the outlawing of opposition and dissent, including any criticism of the king, and the all-pervasive security and intelligence services, all of which is common currency.

On Monday evening, Hamza signed a letter of loyalty to Abdullah, following a meeting with Prince Hassan, the king’s uncle, and other princes, just hours after saying he

would disobey orders by the army not communicate with the outside world after he was put under house arrest.

Awadallah, 56, was economic secretary to the Jordanian premier between 1992 and 1996, and headed the royal court in 2007. After his sacking the following year, he took up a business career in the Gulf, and is believed to have spent the last few years working as a consultant for Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, advising him on the privatisation of Saudi Arabia’s Aramco oil company.

Bin Zaid is a distant relation of the Jordanian royal family with extensive business activities in Riyadh, where he once served as King Abdullah’s special envoy to Saudi Arabia.

Others arrested are reportedly Hamza’s close associates, including his office manager, bodyguards and palace manager, as well as several former state officials.

Safadi said that the security agencies had detected interference and communications, including some with foreign entities, on the “ideal timing” for taking steps towards destabilising Jordan’s security, although he stopped short of calling it an attempted coup. He added that these plots were carried out in parallel with extensive discussions between Prince Hamza and key figures in the Jordanian society that sought to encourage them to undermine national security, with Hamza coordinating his activities with Awadallah. A man linked to a foreign security service, reportedly an Israeli businessman, had contacted Prince Hamza’s wife to offer a plane to fly them out of the kingdom.

On Sunday, Hamza’s mother, Queen Noor, took to Twitter to describe the allegations against her son as “wicked slander,” as his supporters defended him, claiming he was being set up by the king and his son, Crown Prince Hussein, to intimidate Abdullah’s critics and cover up for the government’s corruption and economic mismanagement.

Washington immediately reaffirmed its support for Abdullah, with whom it has recently reached a defence agreement allowing free entry of US forces, aircraft and vehicles into Jordan, although it does not authorise American forces to carry out combat actions within the

country.

The Gulf petro-monarchs, none of whom—whatever their differences with Abdullah—are anxious to see the kingdom destabilised, rushed to offer him their support. Relations have soured in recent years as Abdullah refused to allow Saudi Arabia to mount air strikes against Syria from Jordanian territory or support Riyadh in its dispute with Qatar, leading to a lengthy freeze on Saudi aid to Jordan.

Abdullah also fears that the price for formal relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, envisioned under the Abraham Accords, will be the transfer of control of Jerusalem's holy sites, especially the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, from himself to the Saudi monarch, even though the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty grants Jordan special status there.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has remained notably silent. Relations between the Israel and Jordan have deteriorated in recent weeks amid a very public spat between Netanyahu and Abdullah, following Netanyahu's refusal to allow Crown Prince Hussein to visit the al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem with his own security detail last month, prompting Hussein to cancel his visit.

Jordan then barred Netanyahu's flight over its air space to make what would have been his first official visit to the United Arab Emirates, forcing Netanyahu to cancel his visit and try, unsuccessfully, to ban flights between Jordan and Israel and delay approving a request by Jordan for water.

The crisis gripping Jordan, hailed for decades by the imperialist powers as an oasis of stability in a region wracked by decades of US-led wars and conflicts, has been long in the making. The desert kingdom was carved out of the former Ottoman Empire by the British in the aftermath of World War I as a client state to promote its interests in the oil-rich region. Without oil or other natural resources other than phosphates, it was never a viable state, and deliberately so.

Jordan was from the beginning dependent on external aid, first from Britain, then the United States, which provided some \$1.4 billion and hundreds of millions more in refugee aid last year, and later the Gulf States. It is ruled by a monarch, the scion of a sheikh from the Arabian Peninsula, who appoints and dismisses prime ministers at will as a means of deflecting criticism away from his own corrupt rule. Without a semblance of democratic norms, and with censorship and surveillance widespread, Jordan rests on a system of military patronage.

The country has been profoundly destabilised by the 2003 US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and the proxy war to topple the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, orchestrated by the US, its Gulf allies and Turkey. Jordan has added more than one million Iraqi refugees and 655,000

registered Syrian refugees in addition to a similar number of unregistered Syrians refugees to its population, now numbering over 10 million.

The pandemic has exacerbated the already fragile economy, whose growth in the previous three years had slowed to just 2 per cent a year. Tourism has been gutted, which accounted for nearly 20 percent of GDP, along with remittances from the Jordanian diaspora working in the Gulf, another 12 percent of GDP.

With COVID-19 cases rising and deaths numbering more than 7,200, a public hospital in Al-Salt, close to the capital Amman, ran out of oxygen two weeks ago, which killed at least six people and fueled unrest and demonstrations.

Government debt is expected to rise to 112 percent of GDP, while estimates of growth for 2021 range from a paltry 1.4 percent to 2.5 percent. In March 2020, the International Monetary Fund approved \$1.3 billion in emergency financing, but this is unlikely to be enough. Official unemployment is now 25 percent, undoubtedly a pale reflection of the actual unemployment and underemployment rate, as hundreds of thousands of Jordanians have been forced to quit their jobs in the Gulf.

The coup allegations and the absence of any means within Abdullah's autocratic regime for the Jordanian working class—East Bankers, Palestinians and refugees alike—to express its social concerns and interests testify to the contradictions wracking the global capitalist system. While the economic circumstances are different, this “oasis of stability” faces a crisis of bourgeois rule no less than its neighbours Lebanon, Israel and Iraq.

Abdullah will undoubtedly seek to use the coup allegations to extort financial and political concessions from the new Biden administration and his erstwhile regional allies to prop up his tottering regime.

The Jordanian working class must likewise turn to its allies, the working class throughout the region, to take power, eradicating the arbitrary borders imposed by the imperialist powers and expropriating the regime's ill-gotten wealth in the context of a broad international struggle of the working class against capitalism and for the building of socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact