Who was Behind the Attempted Coup D'etat in Jordan?

On April 3, a number of members of King Abdullah II inner circle and high-ranking officers of the Jordanian army and tribal leaders were detained in the Jordanian capital, Amman, “for security reasons.” Among the detainees is former Crown Prince Hamzah bin Hussein, the eldest son of the late King Hussein by his American-born fourth wife, Queen Noor. Prince Hamzah was Crown Prince of Jordan for four years, but the title was eventually passed on in 2004 to Abdullah II’s eldest son, Hussein, who is now 26.

In addition to Prince Hamzah, a member of the royal family — former head of the royal court Sharif Hassan Bin Zaid and former adviser to King Abdullah II and Minister of Finance Bassem Awadallah were also detained.

The pan-Arab TV channel Al-Mayadeen, publicizing these facts, reported “the discovery of a plot in Amman to remove Abdullah II from power” and the arrest of about 20 people as part of an investigation into “the threat to the stability of the country.”
The Washington Post also reported, citing a senior Jordanian intelligence official, that authorities in the kingdom are allegedly investigating a supposed plot to overthrow King Abdullah II, and believe that at least one other member of the royal family, as well as tribal leaders and members of the country’s security forces, were involved. Law enforcers speculate that the Crown Prince was one of the authors of the plan to overthrow King Abdullah II. Additional detentions are expected. An intelligence spokesman described the plan as “well-organized” and said that the conspirators apparently had “foreign connections,” but would not go into detail.

However, the Jordanian news agency Petra denies the arrest of Prince Hamzah, and a statement released by the agency by Major General Yousef Ahmad al-Huneyti, head of Jordan’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, states that Prince Hamzah was asked to stop “actions that are used to attack Jordan’s security.”

The Secretary General of the Jordanian opposition coalition, Mudar Zahran, claims that the Jordanian military intelligence has already questioned Hamzah and presented him with evidence that he was funding a radical Palestinian terrorist group whose aim was a violent coup d’etat. Several members of the group are noted to be in Europe and their activities are monitored by the Jordanian intelligence services.

Prince Hamzah himself stated in a video message that he was not allowed to communicate with people or use the Internet because he criticized the actions of the government or the king. The army commander ordered him to stay at home and his bodyguards were arrested. The prince denied the conspiracy charges, stating:

“I am not the person responsible for the breakdown in governance, the corruption and for the incompetence that has been prevalent in our governing structure for the last 15 to 20 years and has been getting worse.”

As for the main actors in the current scandal in Jordan, it is reasonable to recall that Prince Hamzah was heir to the throne for four years, but Abdullah II overtook him and sat on the royal throne himself, invoking the last will of his late father. So pushing or using Prince Hamzah to employ “outside forces” in organizing the palace conspiracy was not that difficult.

As for the other two “notable figures,” Hassan Bin Zaid and Bassem Ibrahim Awadallah, they are both also rather troublesome people. The first is from the royal family, also has a Saudi passport, has ties to oil and Palestinian Hamas, has repeatedly acted as an intermediary, both in sensitive deals and in contacts of the Arabian monarchies with the Americans, Iranians, Pakistanis, has transferred donations to Armenian social organizations in France.

Bassem Ibrahim Awadallah is a clear “grey cardinal,” having headed the Royal Court at various years, been head of the Royal Office, Minister of Finance, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, and at the time of his arrest was CEO of Tomoh Advisory in the UAE and Vice President at Arab Bank-Jordan, through which payments went to China and Israel.

So these three Jordanians, each with their own grievances against the royal house and supporters in the army and individual tribes of the kingdom, were not difficult for “outside forces” to use in a subversive action against King Abdullah II under the slogan: “King is leading us the wrong way and deserves to be removed.” And this is exactly the thought that can be seen in the video message made by Prince Hamzah criticizing the monarch for the socio-economic crisis in the country and rampant corruption.

In the coming days, the kingdom’s intelligence services will be busy figuring out who these “outside forces” are and who else of the accomplices come from Jordan’s ruling elite. And given that Jordanian intelligence has long been working on Prince Hamzah, the very public exposure of the plot was clearly just a preventive measure so that “the situation does not go too far.”

The arrests in Jordan of former politicians close to King Abdullah II and associated with liberal reformers have clearly alarmed the United States and other Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia. US State Department spokesman Ned Price was quick to say that US officials are watching developments, and “King Abdullah himself is a key partner of the United States, he has our full support.”

Reuters reported that King Abdullah II was also supported by the authorities of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait and Iraq, and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League. The Office of the Royal Court of Saudi Arabia, for example, endorsed the actions of Abdullah II, which “thwarted attacks on the security and stability of the country.”

The Middle East is one of the most volatile regions on the planet; any moment it could become the scene of some
cataclysmic upheaval or face a coup d'état. The events of the Arab Spring and US military interventions in Syria and Iraq proved this. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, even during these difficult years, the monarchies of the region showed great stability, while the “revolutionary events” mainly developed in the countries of the Arab republics.

But this does not mean that the Arab monarchies are completely safe from anti-government shocks. This is confirmed by the fact that Jordan has repeatedly in recent years shown the possibility of aggravation of the internal situation there. In particular, this is evidenced by the attempted failed coup d'état in the Hashemite monarchy in late 2017, which, as regional media reported at the time, involved three members of the royal family associated with the leaders of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Mohamed bin Salman and Mohamed bin Zayed. At the time, the dissent of the Jordanian monarch Abdullah II to support Riyadh’s intervention in Yemen and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s policy in the region was clearly used by “outside forces” to instigate a coup d’état. In addition, King Abdullah II did not go along with the Sunni states in their boycott of Qatar in 2017, and in Libya and Syria Jordan also behaved clearly not as the Saudis would have liked it.

In addition, Jordan’s criticism of the US and Israel was also growing and caused serious concerns for Washington and Tel Aviv. In particular, given Amman’s reaction to Donald Trump’s attempts, under Israeli influence, to move the capital of the Jewish state to Jerusalem, as well as regarding the Temple Mount, whose official guardians are the Hashemite dynasty. One must not forget that Washington has repeatedly demonstrated its dissatisfaction with Jordan’s policies toward Iran, Russia, and Turkey.

Its opponents had and still have many means to destabilize the situation in Jordan, and not only among disgruntled members of the royal family. It is also worth remembering that, with a small population of 10 million of its own, this country hosts more than two million refugees from the hot spots of the Middle East, the highest per capita percentage of refugees who are constantly undergoing radicalization processes. In addition, the kingdom is experiencing objective economic and financial difficulties, the percentage of national unemployment is very high - about 30%. And amidst all this, the attempts by Abdullah II to develop much-needed trade and economic relations with Iran, purchase agricultural products from it, as well as intensify relations with Russia and China clearly go against the interests of Washington.

At the same time, the events of April 3 can hardly be called a clear attempt at a coup d’etat in Jordan, which is denied to this day by both the official authorities and the media of the kingdom. Most likely, this was another (as in 2017) signal to King Abdullah II from Washington and Riyadh to “tame him,” to make him obedient to the selfish goals of Washington and Saudi Arabia.

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