Has the Arab Spring Come to Jordan?

For a whole week now, Jordan has been shaken by nonstop waves of protests against the draft law on reforming tax reform, for which the IMF lobbied for adoption. This reform calls for significant growth in the income tax. As a result, from June 1 prices in Jordan have already risen 5.5% for natural gas, 16.4% for gasoline, and 19% for electricity. According to data of Jordan’s Ministry of Finance, at the end of 2017 the national debt stood at 38.5 billion dollars or 95.3% of GDP. By 2021, the IMF’s proposed measures should reduce Jordan’s national debt to 77% of gross domestic product.

Clearly, once again the familiar scheme for “honest” fleecing of money from a government, conceived back in 1982 by Professor John Williamson of the Institute for International Economics, has shown itself. In the USA’s government and among its financial elite, this arrangement, by which the IMF today plunders whole countries, has received the name “Washington Consensus.” In just recent years, the IMF’s interference in international economic politics has resulted in the ruin of countries, such as Argentina, Ireland, Spain, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Somalia. The IMF pursues truly just one goal - impoverishment of weaker states with the subsequent appropriation of their assets. Moreover, this is done in favor of the United States of America, whose leading role in the IMF brings Washington colossal benefits. At the same time, the IMF does not give money for commercial projects, but provides funds exclusively for structural modernization of an economy, and the machinery of government as a whole.
Palestinian militant organizations. with memories of 1970’s Black September events, when Jordan’s King Hussein cruelly suppressed the uprising of for whom discussions about their origins and nationality is not especially welcome, since their minds are still fresh
necessitates a sharp turn in Jordan’s foreign policy orientation. About two thirds of Jordan’s citizens are Palestinians,
system, which assumes foreign financial assistance. At the same time, it should be noted that the ethnic problem also
And, for just such independent behavior the IMF sent a reminder about who controls the government’s economic
Ironically, the country must seek new paths to survival and new alliances in the camp of former enemies. This is
Under conditions of its geographic location Jordan’s policies acquired distinct characteristics. While playing off the ambitions of the USA and regional countries, which needed their own stability and understanding of the situation with local conflicts, for many years the Kingdom received humanitarian aid, weaponry, and support for its economy (including IMF credits), army, and functioning of government institutions. Pursuing this same logical course, during the period of 2011 – 2017 Jordan succeeded in receiving nearly 1.2 billion dollars of financial and military assistance for its role as one of the staging areas of the coalition’s battle against Daesh. The realities of 2018 however have created a new picture of distinct dominance by the American-Israeli-Saudi Arabian “axis” in the Middle East. And if previously Jordan was for all intents and purposes the cornerstone of stability in the Palestinian-Israeli situation, the voice of the Sunni-Arab coalition, and key partner of the USA, then today, the situation with the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel demonstrated that the Jewish state is able to dictate single-handedly conditions to the Palestinians. And on the whole, the new USA-Saudi Arabia-Israeli alliance is capable of solving its problems independently, without Jordan’s participation.

Ironically, the country must seek new paths to survival and new alliances in the camp of former enemies. This is illustrated by the recent meeting of Jordan’s King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein Al-Hashimi with the Iranian leader Hassan Rouhani, and also the increasing frequency of contacts with Russia. And Jordan does not intend to delay this process. Indeed the Hashemite monarchy does not wish to find itself in the role of a “junior partner” without a voice. The tension in relations with old allies was on clear display by an occurrence during the April summit of the League of Arab States, when Abdullah refused to shake hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Salman. So, King Abdullah may now fully normalize relations with Assad’s Syria, Iran, and find a new patron, such as Turkey for instance.

And, for just such independent behavior the IMF sent a reminder about who controls the government’s economic system, which assumes foreign financial assistance. At the same time, it should be noted that the ethnic problem also necessitates a sharp turn in Jordan’s foreign policy orientation. About two thirds of Jordan’s citizens are Palestinians, for whom discussions about their origins and nationality is not especially welcome, since their minds are still fresh with memories of 1970’s Black September events, when Jordan’s King Hussein cruelly suppressed the uprising of Palestinian militant organizations.
It is no secret that Jordan is one of the Arab countries that relies on foreign aid. It takes advantage of generous grants from Persian Gulf countries. Behind the scenes in Amman, people talk about allied countries that refused to save Jordan’s government because of Jordan’s refusal to follow the American-Israeli-Saudi Arabian course regarding the Palestinian question. And now, the transfer of the USA’s embassy to Jerusalem further exacerbated the situation, placing Jordan in a difficult position. It is becoming clear, that the current government cannot pursue the previous course under the new situation, while maintaining internal security. The country has found itself alone facing regional and international pressure, as well as the pressure from the street. These are no longer simply protests against the law for an income tax increase, which the government sent to Parliament and refused to recall. The protests have become a court over the country’s government for judging its economic and political methods, in which the protesters saw very serious problems. Jordan’s King dissolved the lower chamber of Parliament under popular pressure and replaced the Prime Minister. But it is clear that this is not the last demand. The protest movement has widened and shifted from the capital Amman to the provinces. Observers believe that protest actions resemble the protests of 1989, and Jordan’s protest movement as part of the Arab Spring in 2011. Though these protests have an economic nature, many experts consider that a regime change in Jordan is a necessary political reform. Proposed solutions should not be specific from the economic point of view, but should move towards political reforms, so that the people can take part in their country’s politics and decision making.

The question remains open for now: So – is this now the Arab Spring, or not?

*Alexandr Orlov, political analyst, expert in Eastern affairs, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook.”*