

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** *Jordanian former Crown Prince Hamzah bin Hussein has papered over a rare public dispute in the country's ruling family in a move that is unlikely to resolve longstanding fissures in society and among Jordan's elite and that echo multiple Middle Eastern fault lines.*

Differences over socioeconomic policies, governance, and last year's normalization of relations between Israel, the UAE, and three other Arab states, as well as leadership of the Muslim world, were laid glaringly bare by a security crackdown in Jordan that targeted not only Prince Hamzah bin Hussein, a popular, modest, and pious 41-year-old half-brother of King Abdullah, but also seemingly unrelated others perceived by the monarch as a threat.

Reading the tea leaves, the perceived threats may be twofold if unrelated: Prince Hamzah's association with powerful conservative tribes whose leaders have, over the last decade, demanded an end to corruption; and prominent figures with close ties to Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi kingdom, home to Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, has been quietly maneuvering to force Jordan, the administrator of the faith's third holiest site, Al-Haram ash-Sharif or the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, to share its role. A say in Jerusalem would significantly boost the kingdom's claim to leadership of the Muslim world.

There is little evidence that the two forces were working together despite government assertions that it had intercepted communications between them in the days prior to last weekend's crackdown, which prompted Prince Hamzah to speak out.



Image source: The Arab Weekly

Prince Hamzah's statement focused on domestic issues, suggesting that the government may have been most immediately concerned that he was fueling further protests—particularly on the eve of Jordan's April 11 centenary. The concern may have created the opportunity to address threats perceived to be less imminent.

The [crackdown led to the arrest](#) of, among others, two prominent leaders of the Al-Majali tribe and political clan, long a pillar of Hashemite rule; and Bassem Awadallah, a former top aide to King Abdullah, finance minister, and envoy to Saudi Arabia, who is also an advisor to Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. Awadallah is a dual Jordanian-Saudi citizen.

The *Washington Post* reported that Saudi FM Faisal bin Farhan had requested during a visit to Amman last Tuesday that [Awadallah be released and allowed to travel to the kingdom](#) with his delegation.

Privately, many Jordanians fear that Saudi Arabia could support efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by turning the kingdom into a Palestinian state that would incorporate those parts of the occupied West Bank that would not be annexed by Israel.

Saudi Arabia has so far refused to establish diplomatic relations with Israel as long as the Palestinian issue remains unresolved. Bin Farhan reiterated the kingdom's position earlier this month but also told CNN that relations with Israel would be "extremely helpful" and bring "tremendous benefits."

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, hard hit by the pandemic and home to one of the world's largest Syrian refugee contingents, were strained by King Abdullah's refusal to embrace former US President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century" Israeli-Palestinian peace plan.



Image source: Arab News

King Abdullah opposed the plan because it recognized Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem, legitimized Israeli settlements in occupied territory, and envisioned Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank.

Saudi Arabia, like other Middle Eastern countries, was quick to express support for King Abdullah.

Prince Hamzah and Awadallah were not known to be close. Tribal leaders rejected Awadallah's privatization of telecommunications, potash, and phosphate companies during his tenure as FM as primarily benefiting the country's allegedly corrupt elite and foreign companies.

Prince Hamzah, in an agreement mediated by his uncle, Prince Hassan bin Talal, and several other princes, pledged allegiance to King Abdullah days after releasing [two clips](#) in which he denounced corruption and poor governance that had allegedly prevailed for much of the monarch's rule. King Abdullah acceded to the throne in 1999.

The agreement takes the immediate sting out of the rare public airing of differences within the ruling family but fails to tackle grievances of the tribes and other segments of the population.

Prince Hamzah's declaration of fealty may be less of a concession than it would appear at first glance. The former crown prince is not believed to aspire to succeeding King Abdullah.



Image source: Pinterest

Moreover, protests going back to the 2011 popular Arab revolts and continuing more recently with the tribal-backed Hirak protest movement have consistently stopped short of demanding regime change.

Tribal leaders went perhaps furthest when in 2011 they issued a statement asserting corruption among members of Kuwait-born Queen Rania's Palestinian family and demanded that King Abdullah divorce his wife.

In the government's statement last Sunday, FM Ayman Safadi studiously avoided speaking of an attempted coup, asserting instead that the former crown prince and others had [targeted "the country's security and stability."](#)

Said a tribal activist: "Our issue is not the king or the family. Nobody is asking for regime change. That does not mean that our leaders have a blank check. They have to introduce real change and accommodate popular demands for transparency and accountable governance."

[This was originally published by BESA Center](#)

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