

Amid Protests In Jordan That Include Calls Against The King And Support For Prince Hamzah, Journalists And Former Ministers Warn: The Sense Of Resentment Is Unprecedented; The Authorities Must Adopt A New Approach

By [Hadeel Al-Kanhal](#) and [Omar Harede](#)
 A wave of protests broke out in Jordan, following a government decision to raise the price of fuel, which aggravated the already serious economic crisis in the country. The protests took the form of demonstrations, a truck drivers' strike, general strikes and riots, especially in the southern parts of the country.^[1] This protest wave differed from previous ones^[2] by crossing an important line: on December 15, during riots in the city of Ma'an in southern Jordan, shots were fired at the security forces, killing the district's deputy police chief, 'Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Dalabih.^[3] Several days later, on December 19, three more police officers were killed while arresting suspects in Al-Dalabih's shooting. The suspects, one of whom was also killed during the raid, were caught with extensive weapons and ammunition. The regime referred to them as "a takfiri^[4] terrorist cell,"^[5] although their militancy was probably motivated by the economic crisis.

Alongside criticism against the government for the rise in prices, the protests also included criticism against King 'Abdullah himself, and claims that he was responsible for the severe crisis in the country. Although criticism of the king and calls to limit his powers were heard in previous protest waves as well, they are still regarded as the breaking of a taboo and the crossing of a red line, and may therefore indicate a real threat to the stability of his regime. Another significant development in the current wave of protests is that the criticism against him was accompanied by suggestions for an alternative ruler: his half-brother Prince Hamzah, who has been under house arrest since being accused of an attempted coup against the king in April 2021.^[6] Expressions of support for Hamzah were heard in protests across the country and also on social media, with some presenting him as an alternative to the king, as stated, and calling on him to intervene in the Jordanian crisis.

Like in some of the previous protest waves, a conspicuous feature of the current one is that the criticism is being voiced, *inter alia*, by the Jordanian tribes, which have always been considered the main support base of the Hashemite regime. In recent years there has been a growing sense of resentment and frustration among the tribes, in light of their exclusion from the country's power centers and due to shifts in Jordan's social makeup. Jordanian officials visiting one of the mourning tents for the police officers killed in the riots were met with angry statements by local sheikhs complaining about the dire economic situation and the regime's conduct.^[7]

At the same time, it is notable that the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has so far refrained from joining the protests or fanning them, and has sufficed with urging the regime to heed the citizens' suffering and address the economic crisis.

Another prominent expression of the dissatisfaction in the country and the king's deteriorating position is a letter sent by Jordanian MP Muhammad 'Inad Al-Fayez, Jordan's former intelligence minister, to Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, urging him to suspend the economic aid to Jordan, since it ends up only "in the pockets of the corrupt gang of decision-makers" and is not used to help the Jordanian citizens.^[8] The letter, posted on Al-Fayez's Facebook page, caused an uproar since it was perceived as a challenge to the regime and an expression of no-confidence in the king. Subsequently, presumably in response to the harsh criticism he incurred, Al-Fayez declared his loyalty to the king and announced his intention to resign from parliament.^[9]

The Jordanian authorities responded to the protests in several ways. The security forces tried to curb the riots in the various regions, while also arresting figures who were supporting the protests or fanning them, including political activist Khaled Turki Al-Majali, editor of the *Kul Al-Urdun* website, who was accused of spreading incitement and slander. Another figure arrested was Majed Al-Sharari, the former mayor of Ma'an and a powerful and popular figure in the city, who was among the leaders of the truck drivers' strike and expressed support for the protests.^[10] His arrest caused an uproar in the city, with residents petitioning for his release and calling for it at demonstrations and on social media.^[11] Another measure taken by the government was to block TikTok, on the grounds that it was being used to praise the violence and spread chaos in the kingdom.^[12]

According to reports, over the past two weeks the chief of the royal court Yousuf Hassan Al-'Issawi held meetings with tribal representatives and with retired generals in various governorates and regions, apparently in an attempt to quell the rage.^[13] On December 31 the government fuel pricing committee announced an 8% reduction in the price of oil derivatives.^[14] On January 2, 2023, in a meeting with dignitaries in the Aqaba governorate, the king announced that he had directed the government to freeze the tax on kerosene for the winter so as to alleviate the burden on the citizens.^[15]

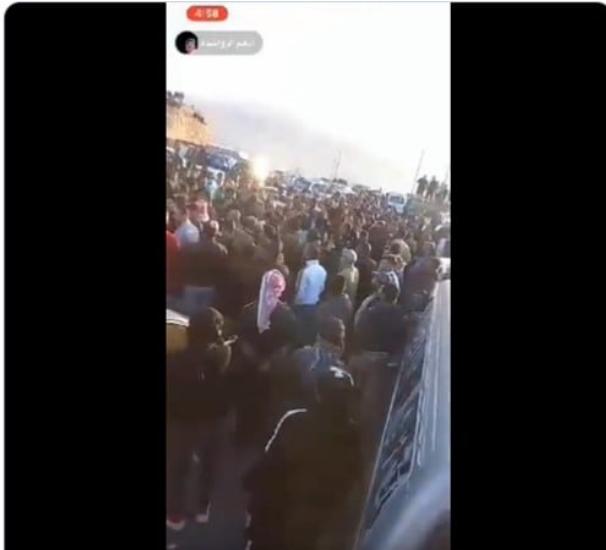
In light of the protests and harsh criticism of the regime, several former ministers and senior journalists published articles warning that the economic crisis has created an unprecedented situation and sparked unprecedented resentment against the regime even among its support base. They called on the Jordanian authorities not to ignore the significant change in the public mood, positions and discourse, but rather to meet the situation with new tools and approaches and enact reforms to stop the deterioration.

This report presents the criticism against King 'Abdullah and the expressions of support for Prince Hamzah during the current wave of protests, as well as excerpts from the articles by the senior journalists and former ministers.

At Demonstrations And On Social Media: Criticism Of The King, Expressions Of Support For Prince Hamzah

The protest and criticism against the Jordanian authorities found expression in demonstrations on the street, as well as on social media, in particular on TikTok, Twitter and Facebook, under hashtags such as "Jordan Is Rebelling," "Jordan Is Unwell," "Trucker Drivers' Strike," "Strike of Honor" and "Free Majed Al-Sharari." As in previous waves of protest, there has been personal criticism against King 'Abdullah, who is seen as responsible for the dire economic crisis. A video from one of the protests shows participants chanting "Why beat about the bush? 'Abdullah is responsible [for the situation]," and "We pledged loyalty to you, but reaped only trouble."[\[16\]](#)

Also conspicuous were expressions of support for the king's half-brother Hamzah, who has been under house arrest for participation in an attempted coup against the king in April 2021.[\[17\]](#) This support has been evident at the demonstrations and in social media posts tagged with the hashtags mentioned above or with "Prince Hamzah" and "the country wants Hamzah." At a December 17 protest march in the Al-Tafaileh neighborhood in the capital, demonstrators called on Hamzah to intervene in the crisis, chanting "O Hamzah bin Al-Hussein, the country is in ruins, where are you?"[\[18\]](#) Another video, from a protest in the Tafila region, showed participants chanting "With spirit and blood we will redeem you, O Hamzah."[\[19\]](#)



The protest in the Tafila region

As mentioned above, Journalist and political activist Khaled Turki Al-Majali, editor of the Jordanian website Kul Al-Urdun, was arrested for messages he posted on Facebook. The posts that led to his arrest were the following. On December 17 he wrote: "Since Hamzah bin Hussein has given up the title of prince and his immunity,[\[20\]](#) I believe that nothing in the constitution rules out appointing him to form a national reform government. I have no doubt that this would be the beginning of a national breakthrough."[\[21\]](#) The post elicited many responses, for example from retired general Muhammed 'Autoom, who was active in the protest movement against the king, and who commented: "That is a creative opinion. [Hamzah] can solve the country's chronic problems. We thank you for your suggestion."

In another post, Al-Majali called to expand the protests to the big cities, writing: "Are the residents of the big cities Amman, Al-Zarqa and Irbid unaffected by the rising prices of fuel??? [You constitute] 65% of Jordan's citizens. Why do you not support your brothers who are striking in the other parts of the kingdom??? Lower fuel [prices] will benefit everyone, not only the strikers. Stand with them, do not watch from the sidelines."[\[22\]](#) As stated, these posts caused him to be arrested for incitement.

Dr Muhammed Autoom and 434 others

December 17 at 5:56 PM

بما ان الشريف حمزة ابن الحسين تنازل عن لقب الامير وحصانته
اعتقد دستوريا لا يوجد ما يمنع من تكليف بتشكيل حكومة إصلاح وطني.
ولا شك عندي بأن ذلك سيكون بداية انفراج وطني.
ما رأي اخوان أصحاب الفتوح الدستوري من خارج جماعة الحكومة

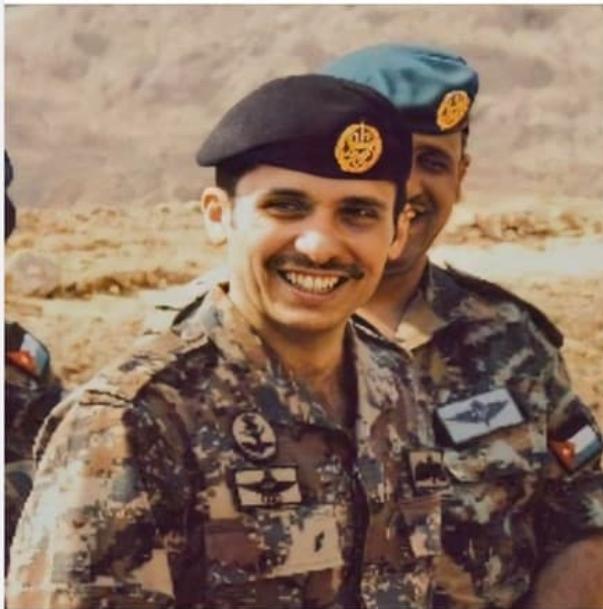
Khaled Turki Al-Majali's response:

وجهة نظر مبنية وحلقة، وسيكون قادرًا على حل مشكلات الوطن المزمنة.
اقتراح نشكّل عليه

Khaled Turki Al-Majali's post and General Muhammed 'Autoom's response

A post expressing support for Prince Hamzah also appeared on December 15 on a Facebook account identified with the Bani Hassan tribe, the largest of Jordan's tribes. The post featured a picture of Hamzah and a quote from him: "I am a free Jordanian and the son of my father [King Hussein]."[\[23\]](#)

- أنا أزدلي حر بمن أنوى -
محمد بن الحسين ❤️



78 comments 4 shares

The post on the Facebook account identified with the Bani Hassan tribe

Senior Jordanian Journalists And Former Ministers: The Situation Is Unprecedented, And The State Must Take Heed

In response to the pointed criticism voiced against the regime during the protests, several senior Jordanian journalists and former ministers penned articles calling on the regime to realize that the public's distress is genuine and severe and find new ways to address it before the protests get out of control.

Jordanian Journalist: The Anti-Regime Sentiment Currently Voiced By The Tribal Sector Is Unprecedented In Its Harshness, Requires Taking A New Approach

Bassam Badarin, a correspondent for the London-based daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* in Jordan, wrote that the intense criticism, unprecedented in its harshness, that is currently being voiced by the Jordanian tribes and by other sectors that have traditionally been supportive of the regime reflects real distress and obliges the regime to take a new approach. He wrote: "The [situation] whereby the mourning tents and tribal councils in Jordan have become hotspots of active protest that crosses red lines is unprecedented... while the local economy is in deep crisis and the [high] cost of living is triggering expressions of rage... The mourning tents and tribal councils are now leading a comprehensive national campaign of criticism [against the government]... An escalating discourse with clear characteristics is evident in the mourning tents and tribal councils. The escalating messages conveyed directly to the senior officials, leaders and generals who visited the mourning tents... were extremely harsh, and even cruel and unprecedented in some cases, especially in areas that always used to be strongholds of support for the regime..."

"This is a new Jordanian reality, which our public has never seen or known in the past, and that our governments over the years have never had to contend with... The debates, the questions and the criticism [heard] in the mourning tents... and in the tribal councils have transcended every threshold the Jordanians have been used to... Some of those who have espoused the critical discourse are former senior position holders, or representatives of tribal circles that have been very loyal to the authorities for decades..."

"Observers note that certain circles that have traditionally been close to the state are [now] voicing opinions that are quite blunt, and, more importantly, refuse to accept the official narrative regarding the death of the martyred [police officers] and direct pointed questions [to the authorities]... This means that we are not talking about the popular protest movement, about oppositionist views or about professional dissidents in exile. Moreover... [this criticism] cannot be misrepresented or described as [an attempt to] subvert the official narrative... [Rather], it reflects a new sense of distress that stems from the fact that the parties, tribes and professional syndicates have been excluded [from the centers of power] for 20 years without being provided with any alternative..."

"Therefore, a new and different approach is needed in the discourse with these elements and on the details [of the situation], and the [ruling] elite may eventually be forced to openly and officially admit that its modernization and empowerment plans have not managed to attract the talented people among the tribes... and [various other] social sectors. [The regime] must come up with a new way to preserve [Jordan's] social structure, which has always served as a shield... for the state's interests and official narratives."[\[24\]](#)

Former Information Minister: The State Must Address The Citizens' Plight So As To Prevent The Situation From Deteriorating

Senior Jordanian journalist Samih Al-Ma'aytah, who formerly served as Jordan's information minister, government spokesman and as editor of the state daily *Al-Rai*, likewise warned that the economic crisis has a negative impact on the mood, sentiments, positions and discourse of the Jordanian public, hinting at the harsh criticism heard during the protests even from tribes and in regions that for years have been considered strongholds of support for the Hashemite royal family. Urging the Jordanian leadership to take heed of this before the situation deteriorates, he wrote: "The state is clearly drowning in managing [little] details and day-to-day events... There are issues pertaining to economy and livelihood that preoccupy the Jordanians and the various state apparatuses, as well as hidden tension stemming from the economic problems... The government is making efforts to maintain the understandings with international elements, believing that this is part of protecting [Jordan's] economic infrastructure, and there is also an effort by various sectors to attain government decisions that will alleviate the cost of living..."

"[But] the state must give serious thought to the effects of the economic crisis on the Jordanian citizens' outlook, positions and priorities. Had the [protests] involved nothing more than anger over the rise in the price of [various] goods, they could have been overcome. But whoever is aware of the people's perceptions, of what they say in spontaneous conversations and of their reactions to what is happening, understands that the economic issue has reshaped society and changed most people's position and priorities. [It has changed] their attitude towards the situation, towards [prominent] figures and towards the important issues... I speak of a significant change in climate among the Jordanians, and in this context, the tools used [by the authorities in the past] are no longer effective..."

"Perhaps some of the state [officials] should stop drowning in everyday details, contemplate what has happened, discern the change that has occurred... in the hearts and minds of the Jordanians as individuals, groups and social forces, and seek ways to minimize the impact of the economic issue and the cost of living on the Jordanians... and on their discourse and the important concerns in their lives. There are also those who follow [what is said on] social media... in tribal [councils], in meetings with [state] officials and in every other forum, as well as in forums that are not public but must be monitored, because they reflect important developments... It is important for the state to be aware of the important impact that the economic issue and the conduct of the executive forces [i.e., the government] have had on the lives of the Jordanians and the major social [forces]. It is vital to seek solutions that will combat this change [among] the Jordanians, who were and will remain the real resource of the state..."

"It is important to understand this change in Jordan's [social] topography, so as to stop any negative development. If these changes are not addressed, they will increase and lead in dangerous directions that may deprive the state of [its ability to maintain] the high standards that used to characterize its relations with the Jordanians, who were and will [remain] the most important weapon against every kind of political, security and economic crisis..."[\[25\]](#)

Jordanian Former Minister: The Crisis Stems From A Years-Long Jordanian Policy And Disinclination To Address The Problems; It's Time For Political And Economic Reforms

Writing in the London-based daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, former foreign minister Marwan Al-Mu'asher called to recognize that responsibility for the current crisis in the country rests with the Jordanian state and with consecutive Jordanian governments, and warned that only immediate political and economic reforms will change the situation. He wrote: "First, we must admit that the current economic situation is the accumulating and inevitable result of [Jordan's] economic and political system, which has largely relied on a rentier economy and on external aid in managing the country, disregarding the need to build an economy based on efficiency, productivity and independent sources of income. The insistence on this economic system was repeatedly justified by saying that time is not right [for change] and that the shortage of natural resources in Jordan compel this country to rely on external income sources until the opportunity [for change] arises... Yes, had there been an impetus for adopting a new [economic] approach that creates a basis for productive systems, we could have avoided these crises or at least limited their effects... But consecutive Jordanian governments failed to do so. More than that, they came up with every [possible] excuse, [trying] to persuade the people that [Jordan] is unable to rely on itself, so as to maintain their political and economic privileges, which were not shared with the people as a whole."

"There is another policy of the Jordanian state that does not correspond with the need to maintain public order. [This is the policy of] using the pretext of national security... to cover up for its economic and political failures, accusing anyone who opposes [its policies] of *takfir* [religious extremism that involves accusing other Muslims of heresy] and of sabotage. This will not solve the problems. The people protesting against the current crisis nod doubt include some *takfiris*, [such as the individuals] who killed the martyr 'Abd Al-Razzaq Al-Dalabih and his [fellow] martyrs from the General Security Forces... But we must be careful not to brand anyone who protests against the current situation as a *takfiri*. This is untrue; moreover, such a narrow approach, which disregards the heart of the crisis, will not solve the problem but only increase the tension and rage on the streets..."

"The methods employed by the Jordanian state in the past – security clampdown, and rentier systems that rely on external aid and cronyism – are no longer sufficient to maintain public order... The consecutive crises that afflict us clearly indicate that we cannot continue cleaving to the policy of putting off [addressing] the problems. We must employ new methods... We need what the late King Hussein called a 'white revolution,' encompassing all the current frameworks and accompanied by real political commitment, that will ensure the implementation of economic and educational plans to promote creativity, innovation and productivity – in practice, not just on the rhetorical level. [This must take place] under the umbrella of political reforms that will ensure transparency, freedom of expression, pluralism of opinion and rule of law for everyone... Otherwise, the political and economic crises will continue to follow one another, and we will continue to come up with excuses for taking [only] temporary measures..."[\[26\]](#)

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[1] See e.g., *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), December 8, 2022; *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), *Al-Arab* (London), December 15, 2022.

[2] On previous protest waves in Jordan, see MEMRI reports:

Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1486 - Concern In Jordan's Royal Court: Queen Rania Targeted In Vicious Anti-Regime Criticism – And Speaks Out For The First Time – November 19, 2019;

Inquiry & Analysis No. 1445, Ongoing Protests In Jordan Threaten To Destabilize The Regime, March 11, 2019;

Inquiry & Analysis No. 1427, [Growing Calls In Jordan To Enact Political Reforms, Limit King's Powers](#), December 10, 2018;

Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1376 - [Protests In Jordan Following Austerity Measures – Including Elimination Of Bread Subsidy](#) – February 21, 2018.

Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1252 - [In Jordan, Criticism And Protests Following Constitutional Amendments Expanding King's Powers](#) – May 30, 2016;

Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 806 - [The Arab Spring in Jordan – Part II: Oppositionists Challenging the Legitimacy of the King and Hashemite Royal Family](#) – March 4, 2012;

Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 900 - [In Jordan, Protests, Rioting, And Calls To Oust Regime Follow Cancellation Of Fuel Subsidy](#) – November 14, 2012;

Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 771 - [The Arab Spring in Jordan: King Compelled to Make Concessions to Protest Movement](#) – December 12, 2011.

[3] *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), December 16, 2022.

[4] *Takfiri* refers to extremist Islamists who accuse other Muslims of heresy and permit killing them.

[5] Ammonnews.net, December 19, 2022. While visiting the mourning tent erected for Al-Razzaq, King 'Abdullah II, who had kept silent since the outbreak of the protests, said that citizens were entitled to express their protest against the dire economic crisis in non-violent and legal ways. He added, however, that he would not allow violence against the security forces and that "anyone who takes up arms against the state, damages property or violates citizens' rights will be handled with all due force" (*Al-Dustour*, Jordan, December 17, 2022).

[6] See MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1569 - Jordan's Prince Hamzah Bin Hussein Is Caught Between Accusations That He Was Planning A Coup And Ongoing Regime Attempts To Marginalize Him – April 5, 2021.

[7] See e.g., Twitter.com/5zfatm, December 23, 2022.

[8] Facebook.com/Alfayez2020, December 21, 2022.

[9] After prominent figures from his Bani Sakhr tribe, including Senate Speaker Faisal Al-Fayez, published a letter denouncing him and his statements, Muhammad 'Inad Al-Fayez attacked his critics, saying he was more loyal to the king and the state than they were. But, as stated, he also promised to resign. Facebook.com/mohdenadalfayez, December 25, 2022.

[10] Arabi21.com, December 18, 2022; ammannet.net, December 19, 2022.

[11] Raialyoum.com, December 30, 2022; Jo24.net, December 31, 2022; assabeel.net, January 1, 2023.

[12] Raialyoum.com, December 16, 2022.

[13] *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), December 29, 2022; *Al-Rai* (Jordan), December 31, 2022; allofjo.net, January 1, 2023.

[14] Petra.gov.jo, December 31, 2022.

[15] Alghad.com, January 2, 2023.

[16] Twitter.com/GHALLLiAAAA, December 16, 2022.

[17] See MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1569 - Jordan's Prince Hamzah Bin Hussein Is Caught Between Accusations That He Was Planning A Coup And Ongoing Regime Attempts To Marginalize Him – April 5, 2021.

[18] Twitter.com/aldstwryh2, December 17, 2022.

[19] Twitter.com/feras1112, twitter.com/aldstwryh2, December 16, 2022.

[20] On April 3, 2022, on the anniversary of the "*fitna*" (civil strife), as the attempted coup was dubbed in Jordan, Hamzahh announced on Twitter that he had "come to the conclusion that his convictions and principles were not in line with the kingdom's modern institutions," and that he therefore felt compelled to "give up the title of prince," although he would continue to be loyal to Jordan and do everything he could to serve his homeland, his people and his forefathers' mission. Twitter.com/HamzahhHKJ, April 3, 2022.

[21] Facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014946729326, December 17, 2022.

[22] Facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014946729326, December 18, 2022.

[23] Facebook.com/111433850238024, December 15, 2022. Hamzah said this in a meeting with Major General Yousef Huneiti, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordanian army, who visited him at home soon after the "*fitna*" incident, to get him to limit his contact with the tribes and stop criticizing the authorities. Facebook.com/Alurdunyya.net, April 5, 2021.

[24] *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), December 26, 2022.

[25] *Al-Ghad* (Jordan), December 25, 2022.

[26] *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (London), December 25, 2022.