

What Craziest Is Going on in Saudi Arabia?

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What's going on in Saudi Arabia? Over 200 bigwigs detained and billions of 'illegal profits' of some \$800 billion confiscated.

The kingdom is in an uproar. The Saudi regime of King Salman and his ambitious 32-year old son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, claim it was all part of an 'anti-corruption' drive that has Washington's full backing.

Utter nonsense. I've done business in Saudi Arabia since 1976 and can attest that the entire kingdom, with its thousands of pampered princes and princesses, is one vast swamp of corruption. In Saudi, the entire nation and its vast oil revenues are considered property of the extended Saudi royal family and its hangers-on. A giant piggy bank.

The late Libyan leader Muammar Khadaffi told me the Saudis are 'an incredibly rich bunch of Bedouins living behind high walls and scared to death of their poorer neighbors.'

We have just witnessed a palace coup in Riyadh caused by the violation of the traditional desert ruling system which was based on compromise and sharing the nation's riches.

Young Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's appointment as heir apparent by his ailing father, King Salman, who is reportedly suffering from cognitive issues, upset the time-proven Saudi collegial system and provoked the current crisis. Among the people arrested so far were 11 princes and 38 senior officials and businessmen, including the nation's best-known and richest businessman, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, who owns important chunks of Apple, Citigroup and Twitter. He's being detained at Riyadh's swanky Ritz Carlton Hotel.

Also arrested was Bakr bin Laden, chairman of the largest Saudi construction firm, The Binladen Group, and former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, a bitter rival to the new Crown Prince Mohammed.

Interestingly, there are no reports of senior Saudi military figures being arrested. The Saudi military has always been kept weak and marginalized for fear it could one day stage a military coup like the one led by Colonel Khadaffi who overthrew Libya's old British stooge ruler, King Idris. For decades the Saudi army was denied ammunition. Mercenary troops from Pakistan were hired to protect the Saudi royals.

The Saudis still shudder at the memory of British puppets King Feisal of Iraq and his strongman, Nuri as-Said, who were overthrown and murdered by mobs after an Iraqi army colonel, Abd al-Karim Qasim, staged a coup in 1958. Nuri ended up hanging from a Baghdad lamppost, leading Egypt's fiery strongmen, Abdel Nasser, to aptly call the new Iraqi military junta, 'the wild men of Baghdad.'

More mysteries arose this tumultuous week. One of Saudi's most influential princes, Mansour bin Muqrin, died in a mysterious crash of his helicopter, an 'accident' that has the smell of sabotage. Another key prince, Miteb, was ousted. He was commander of the famed 'White Guard,' the Saudi Bedouin tribal army designed to protect the monarchy and a former contender for the throne. Meanwhile, three or four other Saudi princes were reportedly kidnapped from Europe and sent home, leading to rumors that Saudi's new ally, Israel, was involved.

It appears that Prince Mohammed and his men have so far grabbed at least \$800 billion from those arrested to refill the war-depleted Saudi coffers. Call this a traditional Arab tribal raid - except that no women or horses were seized.

But behind all this lies the stalemated Saudi war against wretched Yemen, the Arab world's poorest, most backwards nation. Saudi Arabia has been heavily bombing Yemen for over a year, using US-supplied warplanes, munitions, including cluster bombs and white phosphorus, and US Air Force management. A Saudi blockade of Yemen, aided by the US, has caused mass starvation and epidemics such as cholera.

When I first explored Yemen, in the mid 1970's, it was just creeping out of the 12th century AD. Today, it's been bombed back into the 6th Century.

In spite of spending over \$200 million daily (not including payoffs to 'coalition' members like Egypt) the Saudis are stuck in a stalemated conflict against Yemen's Shia Houthi people. The US and Britain are cheerfully selling bombs and weapons to the Saudis. President Donald Trump has been lauding the destruction of Yemen because he mistakenly believes Iran is the mainstay of the anti-Saudi resistance.

Yemen is a horrible human rights disaster and scene of widespread war crimes. It reminds me of the savagery inflicted on Afghanistan by the Soviets in the 1970's.

The Saudis were fools to become involved in Yemen. Prince Mohammed was going to show the tough Yemeni tribes who was boss. Now he knows, and it's not the Saudis.

The Saudis appear to be planning military provocations against bad neighbour Iran. These may include attacks in Lebanon against Hezbollah - which might open the way for US attacks on Iran and its allies. The Saudis are enraged over their defeat in Syria and want revenge.

Is this the beginning of the collapse of the House of Saud? Or a Saudi renaissance led by Prince Mohammed as he claims? Stay tuned.

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