

Who Will be the Next King of Saudi Arabia?

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Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has jailed everyone who poses a threat to his path to becoming King. King Salman’s brother, his brother’s son, Mohammed bin Nayef, and two sons of the previous monarch, King Abdullah, remain under arrest, while a Princess was released from prison recently.

King Abdullah died on January 23, 2015, and the throne passed to Salman, one of the two living sons of the founder of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz Al Saud, while on the same day King Salman named Muhammed bin Nayef as the Crown prince.

Salman’s younger full brother, [Prince Ahmad bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud](#), is the other son of the founder of Saudi Arabia.

In March 2020, Prince Ahmad was detained in Saudi Arabia in what can be termed as house arrest after returning from London, with assurances that he would be free.

The government of King Salman is solely run by Crown Prince Mohammed, his young son, otherwise known as MBS. It was MBS who issued the orders to arrest his Uncle, Prince Ahmad, and the former Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Nayef, his cousin.

Both Prince Ahmad and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef received their higher education in America, and both had formerly held the position of Minister of the Interior.

Prince Ahmad opposed MBS becoming Crown Prince, while Mohammed bin Nayef held the position in 2017. Prince Ahmad sits on a Royal family body which is charged with the approval of the accession to the throne of Saudi Arabia.

In February 2017, Mike Pompeo, as head of the CIA, awarded Mohammed bin Nayef the George Tenet Medal in recognition of his “excellent intelligence performance, in the domain of counter-terrorism”.

On 21 June 2017, Crown Prince Muhammed bin Nayef was replaced as the heir to the Saudi Kingdom by MBS in a move considered to be “upending decades of royal custom and profoundly reordering the kingdom’s inner power structure.”

He also lost his position as interior minister. He had been crown prince and first deputy prime minister of Saudi Arabia from 2015 to 2017 and the minister of interior from 2012 to 2017.

Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst, and counter-terrorism expert served for 29 years until his retirement in 2006. He recalled Vice President Al Gore's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 1998, when Prince Mohammed bin Nayef and his father Prince Nayef had prevented a plot by Al Qaeda to attack the US consulate in Jeddah while Gore was there.

[Riedel said](#) of Mohammed bin Nayef's imprisonment, "He has not faced any judicial process that we know of. The charge of treason is absurd. He is in prison because he is the symbol of a viable, competent alternative to the reckless and dangerous crown prince. Mohammed bin Salman wants to eliminate the leading candidate for leading Saudi Arabia away from its current perilous course and back to being a responsible partner. The Biden team, especially its new intelligence leadership, should press for MBN's freedom."

In November 2017, MBS ordered his relatives to be rounded up like criminals and locked up dozens of Princes at the luxurious Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh. MBS billed the shake-down as an anti-corruption operation while draining his relatives of much of their money.

On June 21, 2018, [Ben Hubbard](#), NYT journalist and author, received an Arabic text message on his cellphone which looked suspicious. After consulting with technology researchers at Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto's Munk School, it was confirmed that Hubbard was the first US journalist targeted by powerful software sold by NSO Group, an Israeli company, and deployed by hackers working for Saudi Arabia.

Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon and the Washington Post, had similarly been hacked by the same Pegasus software on orders from MBS, in an intimidation tactic for the Washington Post's reporting that their journalist, Jamal Khashoggi had been executed in 2018 on orders of MBS.

Agnes Callamard, the United Nations special rapporteur on summary executions and extrajudicial killings, and Gina Haspel, the head of the CIA, both concluded that the order to murder Khashoggi came from MBS.

In [March 2020](#), Muhammed bin Nayef was arrested along with his Uncle Prince Ahmed. The move to arrest the former Crown prince along with the younger brother of King Salman was an obvious tactic to remove potential rivals to the future succession to the throne after the current King Salman should die. MBS wants to secure his seat on the throne of the only absolute monarchy.

The Wall Street Journal reported there were claims made by Saudi authorities that the two men were plotting a coup against King Salman and his son MBS, but no proof was offered.

Mohammed bin Nayef was at first held in solitary confinement, deprived of sleep, and [suspended upside down by his ankles](#), which has left him permanently unable to walk without a cane. He is kept alone with no television or other electronic devices and receives only limited visits from his family. In the fall of 2021, he was moved to a villa inside the complex surrounding King Salman's Al-Yamamah Palace in Riyadh.

Besides Muhammed bin Nayef's success in counter-terrorism and his educational

background, he was seen as among the staunchest supporters of the US among the Saudi royals, as was his Uncle Prince Ahmed. Experts believe this is a further factor why MBS targeted the two for arrest. MBS is said to harbor disdain for the US and wants to move away from being dependent on Washington. Trump's famous speech about the US being the only thing holding the Saudi King on his throne reinforced MBS's resolve to distance the royal family from the US.

Earlier this month, it was reported [Princess Basmah](#), daughter of Saud, the son of the founder of Saudi Arabia, was released from prison after three years of detention without charges. She would be the niece of both King Salman and Prince Ahmed.

Her daughter, [Suhoud al-Sharif](#), was also released from Al-Ha'ir prison. The mother-daughter pair's arrest came in March 2019 after Princess Basmah had planned a trip to Switzerland to receive treatment for a heart ailment.

Princess Basmah had been an outspoken critic of the Saudi treatment of women's issues. But, experts also point to the fact she was an ally of Mohammed bin Nayef as being another reason MBS locked her up.

While speaking to BBC Arabic in 2018, Princess Basmah accused MBS of refusing to accept those who did not support his overhaul plans, known as Vision 2030. "He has a vision, Vision 2030, and I see that in that vision, there is a direction toward a type of isolation of all those who do not agree with that vision," she said.

The future King of Saudi Arabia may want to keep his distance from Washington, but that doesn't mean that the US isn't interested in who takes up the throne in the kingdom in the sand.

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