

VISION 2030: REFORMS OF MUHAMMAD BIN SALMAN

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Abstract: This article analyzes the Vision 2030 program promoted by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the wide-ranging political, economic, and social reforms implemented within its framework. The article highlights changes such as diversifying Saudi Arabia away from an oil-dependent economic model, expanding the rights of youth and women, and developing tourism and logistics. It also highlights the successes and challenges of the reforms, domestic political competition, international pressures, and cultural transformations in society. The study also examines the future of Saudi Arabia and its impact on geopolitical processes in the region.

Keywords: Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's reforms, NEOM, Tourism and logistics, Political and social transformations, Women's rights.

Introduction: Muhammad bin Salman Al Saud (born 31 August 1985), known to Arabs as MBS or MbS, is the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia. He also serves as Chairman of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs and the Council for Political and Security Affairs. He is the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, a position he held until his appointment as prime minister in 2022. He served as Minister of Defense from 2015 to 2022. He is the seventh son of King Salman. He has been ranked as the 8th most powerful person in the world by Forbes. His personal fortune is estimated at least \$25 billion, making him one of the wealthiest royals and individuals in the world.

Mohammed bin Salman was born as the first child of Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz and his third wife, Fahda bint Falah Al-Khitline. After earning a law degree from King Saud University, he began serving as an advisor to his father. After becoming king, Salman appointed Mohammed as Minister of Defense and Deputy Crown Prince in 2015. Mohammed was promoted to Crown Prince in 2017 after King Salman's nephew, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, was dismissed. Salman will hand over the post of Prime Minister to his son in 2022.

Main part: The annual anniversary of the oath-taking ceremony for Saudi citizens has become a symbol of new reforms and unprecedented changes in various fields. This continuous progress is at the heart of Vision 2030, a plan designed to diversify the Kingdom's economy, ensure sustainable development, unlock the potential of promising sectors, and transform Saudi Arabia into a leading economic power in the region and beyond.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz has made the interests of the country, the well-being of citizens and their quality of life the main priorities of his policy. His leadership strongly promotes support for youth and women, while preserving Saudi Arabia's original values and rich cultural heritage, and strengthening the Kingdom's bright image on the world stage.

Tourism occupies a special place among the key sectors that are advancing Saudi Arabia's transformation. Through ambitious projects such as NEOM, the Red Sea Project and Qiddiya, as well as the introduction of an electronic tourist visa, the Kingdom has managed to

attract large-scale investments and millions of tourists. For Saudi citizens, the annual anniversary of the oath-taking ceremony has become a symbol of new reforms and unprecedented changes in various fields. This continuous development is at the heart of Vision 2030, a plan designed to diversify the Kingdom's economy, ensure sustainable development, unlock the potential of promising sectors, and transform Saudi Arabia into a leading economic power in the region and beyond.

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Tourism is a key sector driving Saudi Arabia's transformation. Through ambitious projects such as NEOM, the Red Sea Project, and Qiddiya, as well as the introduction of an electronic tourist visa, the Kingdom has attracted significant investment and millions of tourists.

Under the leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Saudi Arabia launched its Vision 2030 program in 2016, embarking on a path of major reforms toward a brighter future. This bold plan is designed to build on the Kingdom's unique strengths—its central position in the Arab and Islamic worlds, its strong investment potential, and its strategic geographic location.

Vision 2030 is a detailed plan that aims to diversify the Kingdom's economy, empower citizens, create a favorable environment for local and international investors, and transform Saudi Arabia into a global leader.

The program is being implemented in clear phases, with each phase lasting five years and building on previous achievements. The first phase included extensive structural reforms across the public sector, economy, and society.

The second phase saw a deeper focus on strategies, significant investments in key sectors and major projects, and tangible results across the country. This phase was marked by faster social liberalization, the expansion of previously artificially restricted economic sectors (such as mass entertainment), and increased repression of domestic criticism.

An important basis for this second phase was the removal of his main rival, Mohammed bin Nayef (MBN), from the political scene in June 2017 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS).

While television footage of MBN swearing allegiance to MBS still raised some doubts about the monopolization of power, the famous "Ritz Party" in November of this year put an end to these doubts.

That night, MBS and his closest advisers formally arrested hundreds of royals, business leaders, and senior officials at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Riyadh on suspicion of corruption, and had large amounts of property confiscated from many of them.

In practical terms, this event confirmed MBS's dominance in the kingdom and provided significant financial resources to finance Vision 2030 projects.

With political rivals eliminated, MBS began to push forward with social reforms more actively.

For example, after MBS left office, King Salman issued a decree granting women the right to drive — a response to years of internal and external pressure. MBS also described the kingdom's recent past as a "period of marginalization" and heralded the new reforms as a

“return to original, moderate Islam.” This resulted in a number of policy changes that expanded women’s rights, but the newly enacted “Personal Status Law” still preserved gender injustices in matters of divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

Visible changes in society: The previously existing "family" and "men-only" sections of restaurants and cafes have been removed.

Men and women have begun to participate in public spaces in a mixed manner, especially in large cities.

Cinemas and concerts have resumed, and even rave music festivals have been held in the desert around Riyadh.

Religious scholars, however, have not opposed these reforms, but have instead tried to justify them with religious rulings.

However, along with social liberalization, repression has also increased.

In early 2018, Saudi Arabia was not yet like the United Arab Emirates, where it was possible to discuss politics and reforms in private. But soon: Independent religious scholars began to be arrested.

Activists who had previously advocated for the right of women to drive were arrested and tortured.

The most famous incident was the October 2018 killing of Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul, a prominent journalist who worked for the Washington Post and was critical of the kingdom.

After the Khashoggi incident:

MBS has maintained his power despite international pressure and domestic concerns.

Even today, Saudi officials present Vision 2030 policies solely in the person of MBS.

Even minor political details are emphasized as MBS’s personal involvement.

Financial results of Vision 2030:

The kingdom began to replenish the state budget with sources other than oil: a 15% VAT (a large value-added tax) was introduced, and other taxes covered 66% of civil servants’ salaries.

After the reforms, unemployment fell, and new jobs were created mainly through the private sector.

Since 2016, more than 70,000 Saudi nationals have been employed in the restaurant and entertainment sector.

The third phase will focus on consolidating the impact of the changes and effectively exploiting new growth opportunities.

As development continues, Saudi Arabia remains committed to its goals. Through Vision Realization Programs, national strategies, and major projects, Vision 2030 is fundamentally transforming the country’s socio-economic landscape. This will improve the quality of life for citizens and residents, expand growth and investment opportunities, strengthen global integration, and improve the efficiency of government.

Saudi Arabia is building a future that combines tradition, innovation, and sustainability, creating unlimited opportunities for citizens to realize their potential, and ushering in a new era of development and prosperity for the Kingdom.

Conclusion: Mohammed bin Salman's reforms are of great importance for the future of Saudi Arabia, aimed at transforming the country from its historical, cultural, and economic context into a globally competitive state. The Vision 2030 program includes broad goals such as reducing the economy's dependence on oil, renewing the social system, and creating new jobs for the younger generation. At the same time, the implementation of these reforms is having a significant impact not only on the domestic, but also on the regional and global political arena.

The positive aspects of the reforms include the acceleration of investment flows and the creation of new opportunities in modern economic sectors in the country, as well as steps aimed at promoting freedom and equality in society. Efforts to expand women's rights and increase youth activity are undoubtedly leading to a renewal of the social structure. However, there are also negative aspects of the reforms. In the process of their implementation, they are faced with strong social resistance, obstacles associated with traditional values, and difficulties in maintaining political balance. Also, the full effectiveness of the reforms will take time, since they include not only political and economic reforms, but also large-scale cultural changes.

Mohammed bin Salman's reforms will certainly shape Saudi Arabia's economic and political development, but they will become more apparent over time in their impact on the social fabric of the state. If the reforms are successfully implemented, Saudi Arabia will strengthen its position not only in the regional but also in the global arena. Thus, the future of these reforms and their social, economic and political prospects will be a key factor in determining the country's success.

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