

**Saudi Arabia**

## Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman appointed prime minister

Kingdom's day-to-day ruler takes over role from king in move said to reflect his de facto position



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is seen as the driving force behind a plan to overhaul the once ultra-conservative country © Fayez Nureldine/AFP/Getty Images

**Samer Al-Atrush** in Dubai YESTERDAY

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Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has replaced his father King Salman as prime minister, according to a royal decree, a move that further cements the son's role as the kingdom's day-to-day ruler.

King Salman, 86, remains head of state, but the decree promotes the ambitious crown prince, who has overseen a plan to reform the country's economy, to become head of government. Prince Mohammed has previously served as deputy prime minister.

There has been much speculation about when Prince Mohammed will succeed his father, but one Saudi commentator familiar with the royal court's thinking said the move had nothing to do with the king's wellbeing and merely reflected Prince Mohammed's effective role.

"This has nothing to do with the king's health," said Ali Shihabi. "This converts a de facto situation into a de jure situation and it eliminates some protocol-related awkwardness, since the prince's previous rank was deputy prime minister and he was dealing with heads of government and heads of state."

The decree is not expected to change the course of Saudi domestic and foreign policy.

The decree promoted Prince Mohammed's brother Prince Khalid from deputy defence minister to defence minister, while retaining another brother, Abdulaziz bin Salman,

as energy minister. The foreign and finance ministers were unchanged.

Prince Mohammed, 37, is seen as the driving force behind a plan to overhaul the once ultra-conservative country that relies on oil revenues. The reforms have helped diversify the economy, though critics say not by much so far, while rolling back religious strictures that banned women from driving until 2018.

But he has also been widely criticised for an accompanying crackdown on critics that most recently saw a PhD student and mother of two [jailed for decades over her tweets](#).

The prince had been boycotted by US president Joe Biden, who came to office vowing to turn Saudi Arabia into a pariah over the 2018 murder of journalist and critic [Jamal Khashoggi](#) by Saudi security agents. The CIA concluded that Prince Mohammed had ordered a “capture-or-kill mission”, something the prince has denied. Saudi Arabia says the men responsible for the murder have been tried and imprisoned.

Prince Mohammed’s former position as deputy prime minister had been used by the Biden administration as an excuse not to deal with him, saying he would deal with a fellow head of state. The US president was in July [forced to backtrack on his position](#) and visit the kingdom, where he met Prince Mohammed, hoping to push for more Saudi oil production to offset high global prices.

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