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## Saudi King Abdullah Names Interior Minister as Crown Prince

By Glen Carey - Oct 28, 2011

Saudi Arabia's [King Abdullah](#) named his interior minister and half brother as crown prince, putting a conservative chief of police next in line to lead the world's largest oil exporter.

The appointment of Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, 78 this year, was announced by state television, citing a royal decree. Saudi princes pledged their allegiance to Nayef, it said.

Head of the [Interior Ministry](#) since 1975, Nayef becomes the most powerful prince in the kingdom at a time of turmoil in the Middle East and high unemployment at home. He backed the religious police and clamped down on the Shiite minority, according to Jane Kinninmont at [Chatham House](#) in London.

"Nayef has spent his entire career as the country's police chief and is going to keep a firm lid on dissent," said British author and historian [Robert Lacey](#). "He will do it his way."

His predecessor, Prince Sultan, died on Oct. 22. He was buried in an unmarked grave in [Riyadh](#) in accordance with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. U.S. Vice President [Joe Biden](#) led an American delegation to Riyadh yesterday to offer condolences to Abdullah. The delegation met with Nayef and Prince Salman, the governor of the Riyadh province.

### 'Power Struggles'

As popular uprisings toppled leaders in Tunisia, Egypt and [Libya](#) this year, King Abdullah, 87 this year, sent troops to [Bahrain](#) to crush a mainly Shiite-led revolt while Nayef's security forces prevented dissent at home.

King Abdullah didn't appoint a minister of defense and aviation to replace Sultan, who held that position since in 1963. Nayef kept his post as interior minister.

Royal family members "will start jostling to put their sons in prominent positions and you will see power struggles playing out in quite a lot of different ministries," Kinninmont, a senior research fellow for the [Middle East](#) and North Africa Program, said today. "There is also uncertainty about the next defense minister."

King Abdullah changed the kingdom's succession rules in 2007 to give an appointed commission of princes, called the Allegiance Council, more power to select a new ruler. The council would name the crown prince after Nayef.

## Family Run

Prince Salman, the governor of Riyadh provinces since 1962, is one of the most senior princes. Abdullah's son Prince Mutaib is head of the National Guard, an 110,000-man Bedouin force loyal to the royal family, and another son, Prince Abdul Aziz, is the deputy foreign minister. Sultan's son, Prince Khaled, is the assistant defense minister, and Nayef's son, Prince Mohammad, is the assistant interior minister.

In September last year, Nayef said Saudi Arabia was able to "crush" the ideology of terrorism, the official Saudi Press Agency said. The Interior Ministry forces have arrested 11,527 people since Sept. 11, 2001, for their alleged involvement in terrorism, according to a statement in April from the ministry.

"Crown Prince Nayif has served his nation with dedication and distinction for more than 35 years," U.S. President [Barack Obama](#) said in a statement today. "We in the [United States](#) know and respect him for his strong commitment to combating terrorism and supporting regional peace and security."

The government has suppressed Islamic militant activity inspired by al-Qaeda after they staged violent strikes aimed at weakening the ruling Saud family's control and breaking the kingdom's relationship with its U.S.

"It is a [free country](#) that has never been subjugated by any power in the world and no one other than Allah Almighty has a favor over this nation and this state," the official Saudi Press Agency cited Nayef as saying in a speech on Oct. 18. The "law of God prevails," the agency cited him as saying.

## Oil, Religion

Oil fell in [New York](#), trimming its biggest weekly gain since February. Crude for December delivery dropped as much as 75 cents to \$93.21 a barrel on the [New York Mercantile Exchange](#) and was at \$93.62 at 3:30 p.m. Sydney time.

The religious police, who patrol the kingdom's streets enforcing Islamic law under Nayef's control, received part of 1 billion riyals (\$267 million) for religious establishments after clerics backed a ban on domestic protests earlier this year.

The ministry under Nayef also commands a 35,000-strong unit protecting the world's largest crude oil reserves.

Nayef is “a highly capable security practitioner that will maintain the security of the Saudi state,” Rohan Gunaratna, head of the Singapore-based International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, said.

## Iranian Plot

Tension between [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Iran](#), the top two producers in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, won't mitigate “if and when Nayef becomes king,” said [Theodore Karasik](#), director of research at the Dubai-based Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis.

“There will be a shift in foreign policy priorities that will expand the anti-Iranian front emerging under Saudi Arabia's lead,” Karasik said in an interview.

Predominantly Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia has accused Shiite- led Iran of interfering in the affairs of Arab countries in the [Persian Gulf](#), home to three-fifths of the world's oil reserves. Iran denies the allegation and accuses Sunni rulers in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia of discriminating against Shiites.

The U.S. on Oct. 11 said Iranians had plotted to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in [Washington](#). A week earlier, the kingdom accused an unidentified foreign country of seeking to undermine Saudi stability after 11 security personnel were injured in an attack in Awwamiya, a Shiite village in Saudi Arabia's [Eastern Province](#).

## ‘Old Fashioned’

Saudi Shiite “perceive prince Nayef as someone with a more old fashioned viewpoint, who associates Shiite with Iran,” said Kinninmont at Chatham House in [London](#).

Six kings have ruled Saudi Arabia since it was established in 1932. Abdullah, who headed the National Guard, was considered a conservative before being crowned monarch in 2005, and an unlikely advocate of social changes, including a gender mixed university established in 2009, and efforts to improve working opportunities for women.

Abdullah's cabinet allocated \$384 billion in August last year to develop transportation, housing and education, targeting an [unemployment rate](#) estimated at 10 percent.

“Nayef may surprise us all in how much economic modernization he allows -- and social liberalization too,” Lacey, the historian, said.

The Saudi economy will grow will grow 6.5 percent this year, compared with 4.1 percent in 2010, the Washington-based [International Monetary Fund](#) said in a review of the Saudi economy in August.

## **‘Play the Part’**

“Once you become king, you play the part and try to implement good economic policies,” Mohammed al-Qahtani, a democracy advocate and economist, said in an interview. “You will see the same trend under Nayef.”

The government held [municipal elections on Sept. 29](#) for all Saudi men who were 21 and older unless currently serving in the military. The same month, Abdullah granted women the right to vote in future municipal elections as part of changes that will allow them to be appointed to the Shoura Council, a royally appointed consultative body composed of 150 male members.

Nayef expressed a different position on women in politics, saying that “he doesn’t see the need for women to vote,” Kinninmont said. In March 2009, Nayef dismissed the need to hold elections, Al-Jazirah newspaper reported, and said women aren’t needed as members of the Shoura Council.

“Abdullah has done quite an impressive balancing act, and has helped to improve Saudi’s image internationally,” said Kinninmont. “But if Nayef is next, he will have a very difficult act to follow.”

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