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Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz
al-Saud

(1930-2011)

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The demise of Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz leaves a void in Saudi Arabia's succession issue making it more complex at a time when the region is facing severe political turmoil in the form of Arab Spring. The ageing leadership has already given rise to speculations about the future of the al-Saud. Some palace watchers have been expressing doubts about its stability once the Generation Next princes takeover the helm of affairs. The younger sons and the grandsons of founder, King Ibn Saud, have been positioning themselves for the fierce completion.

At this stage, the most likely successor for the Crown Prince is Interior Minister Prince Naif, who is also the Second Deputy Prime Minister since 27 March 2009. Indeed, even though Abdullah became the King in August 2005, he took more than three years to appoint Naif to that position. However the appointment of a new Crown Prince is likely to be made through the 35-member Allegiance Council which was created by King Abdullah in 2006. Through

this reform measure Abdullah seeks to formalise the opinion of princes (sons and grandsons of the founder King) in determining the succession. It would be for the first time that the King alone does not appoint the Crown prince, if the Allegiance Council is mandated to make the appointment.

On 22 October a cryptic message put out by the Royal Court declared: "With deep sorrow and distress, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah announces the demise of his brother Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, who passed away early Saturday morning." The Crown Prince was in the United States for treatment since mid June where he died. It was also announced that the funeral prayer for the prince would be held in the Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque in Riyadh on Tuesday after the *Asr* (late afternoon) prayer.

Prince Sultan was also the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence and Aviation. He served as the Minister of Defence for nearly five decades since he was given the charge by King Faisal in 1962. He was later appointed as the Second Deputy Prime Minister by his full brother King Fahd in 1982. Sultan became Heir Apparent since 1 August 2005, a position he held until his death.

He was born on 30 December 1930; however some sources give the year of birth as 1924. His mother was Princess Hassa Al-Sudairi (1910-2003), who was from the Sudairi clan. Along with his six brothers Prince Sultan formed the powerful block, common known as Sudairi Seven. Like other brothers Sultan received his early education in religion, culture and diplomacy in the Royal Court.

His political life started in 1947 when he was appointed the Governor of Riyadh by his father and founder of the Kingdom. He also held the portfolios of Ministries of Agriculture and Communication during various times. The prince was also known as *Sultan al-Khair* (goodness) because of his popularity as humanitarian prince. On numerous occasions he represented Saudi Arabia at the UN General Assembly meetings and Arab and Islamic summits.

Prince Sultan played a pivotal role in Saudi Arabia seeking and positioning US-led allied forces following the 2 August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and subsequent allied-led war against Iraq.

As Defence and Aviation Minister and Inspector General he oversaw a major build-up of the armed forces of the Kingdom and contributed to the growth and progress of the national career, *Saudia*. As its Chairman he was instrumental in imposing a smoking ban in all Saudi airports. He also served as Chairman of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD), an organization which he founded in 1986 for the protection of the nation's indigenous wildlife. In 1995 he established the Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Charity foundation that funds social services and health care for the elderly and comprehensive rehabilitation programme for the physically challenged.

Prince Sultan was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2004 and had been to the United States in early 2009 for treatment and remained outside the country. Convalescing in Morocco for almost a year, he returned to the Kingdom in early 2010.

Prince Sultan leaves behind his two wives, Princess Huda and Princess Areej, and a number of sons and daughters. His son Prince Khalid has been looking after the Ministry of Defence since his father was taken ill in 2004 while another son Prince Bandar was Saudi Arabia's

Ambassador to the US from 1983 to 2005 and has been named Secretary-General of the National Security Council in October 2005. His other sons include Fahd, Abdullah, Turki, Meshal and Faisal.

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