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**Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz al
Saud**

(1934-2012)

By

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Security Czar Crown Prince Nayef Bin Abdul-Aziz, the Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia since 1975, and the heir-apparent since last October, died in Geneva on 16 June while undergoing treatment for undisclosed ailment. The following day he was buried in the al-Adl cemetery close to the Masjid al-Haram or Grand Mosque in Mecca after sunset prayers led by King Abdullah. The death would necessitate King naming another heir to the throne in less than a year. Prince Salman bin Abdul-Aziz long-time Governor of Riyadh who became the Second Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister last November following the death of Crown Prince Sultan, is the favourite to be named the next Crown Prince. As per the al Saud tradition, the name has to be proposed by the King and then endorsed by the 35-member Allegiance Council, comprising the sons and grandsons of the founder King. Should Prince Salman, another member of the powerful Sudari Seven, get the nod, it will give the monarchy a unique situation where both the King and Crown Prince would be identified as reform- oriented.

The appointment of Crown Prince may not be tough for the 89-year old ailing monarch, but the appointment of Second Deputy Prime Minister (or second in line of succession) would be difficult and may witness a lot of contestations within the family. It is expected that a third generation prince may be appointed as most of the living sons of founder Ibn Saud are too old, have renounced their rights in favour of their sons or are more involved in family business than in politics. However, the popular Deputy Interior Minister, Prince Ahmed bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, the youngest among Sudairi-seven would be a strong contender.

This process might take time as King and Salman would be more pre-occupied with the reform process in the oil-monarchy. For example, in 2005 after he became King, Abdullah delayed the appointment of the Second Deputy Prime Minister till 2009, when he was forced to appoint the Nayef as Second Deputy Prime Minister. With both King Abdullah and Crown Prince Sultan suffering from health complications and required periodic visits abroad for medical treatment someone was needed to run the country. Prince Nayef was however swiftly made the Crown Prince when his full brother and heir to the throne Prince Sultan died last October.

The reason for not naming Nayef as Second Deputy Prime Minister for nearly four years was partly due to the 'conservative' tag he carried and perhaps King Abdullah did not want someone close to the line of succession opposing his reform moves. Nayef reportedly was opposed to a number of reform moves initiated by the King, mainly with respect to the demands by the minority Shias and liberals towards political openings and women's rights. He was not happy when Abdullah as Crown Prince and *de facto* ruler had personally met liberal intellectuals, including academicians, writers and journalists, in January 2003 to accept their petition *Strategic Vision for the Present and Future* that demanded political reforms. Nayef again was reportedly upset over Abdullah's meeting with a Shia delegation in March the same year when the latter submitted a petition *Partners in One Nation* demanding more rights for the Shias. These could be the reasons why the King was reluctant in appointing Nayef as second to the heir-apparent.

Reiterating the prevailing perceptions about him after becoming the Crown Prince, Prince Nayef reiterated his commitments to Wahhabi Islam and the need for Saudi Arabia to preserve its culture, tradition and ideology. Addressing a conference of clerics he observed Saudi Arabia would "never sway from and never compromise on" its adherence to the puritanical, ultraconservative Wahhabi doctrine. The ideology, he declared "is the source of the Kingdom's pride, success and progress."

The late Prince was a self-proclaimed hard-liner and close to conservative *ulema*, the powerful Wahhabi religious establishment, which provides the religious legitimacy to the Al Saud rule. He was at the helm of Saudi operation to cleanse the country of home-grown terrorism and had ferociously crushed the Al Qaeda's Saudi branch following the American pressure in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 attacks and several bombings and attacks inside the Kingdom in 2003. However, Prince Nayef had a roller-coaster relationship with the US. At one level, he presided over the Saudi crackdown against al-Qaida and but the same time he was weary of the US. Moreover, in a controversial media interview he blamed the Jews for the September 11 attacks. Along with fighting al-Qaida, he was also instrumental in the arrest of several liberal and dissenting political activists and gave free hand to the religious police (The Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice) to enforce strict adherence of Islam in public.

Nayef was born in 1934 in the city of Taif, to Ibn Saud (founder King) and Princess Hassa Al-Sudairi (1910-2003), who was from the Sudairi clan of the royal family. Nayef like most of the brothers received early education in religion, culture and diplomacy in the Royal Court. His political career started in 1951, when he was appointed Deputy to the Governor of Riyadh. He shortly held the post of Governor of Riyadh during 1953-54, when he was replaced by Salman and was moved to the Interior Ministry. In 1975 he was made Interior Minister, a position he held until his death.

He presided over a number of committees and councils, prominent among them are the Human Resource Fund, the Saudi Academy for Information and Communication and the important Supreme Hajj Committee. He as Interior Minister worked for the strengthening of internal security and presided over the comprehensive overhaul of the security apparatus inside the Kingdom, establishing a number of directorates and departments in the Interior Ministry including, the General Directorate for Civil Defence, the General Directorate for Border Security, the Department of Prisons and a Department for defence research and development. He also gave grants to universities in the Kingdom for research and studies on peace, national unity and strategic studies.

Prince Nayef had a soft corner for the Muslims fighting for their rights around the world and instituted relief funds for Muslims in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Chechnya, Somalia and Palestine. He was married thrice and has ten sons and daughters, prominent among them is his eldest son from second wife Jawhara bint Abdul-Aziz Al Jiluwi, Muhammad bin Nayef Al Saud who is Assistant Minister for Interior in-charge of security affairs since 1999.

The sudden demise of Nayef has given rise to speculation regarding the succession issue which may lead to infighting within Al Saud that may destabilize the largest oil producer in the world. Given the delicacy of the situation, it would be safe to assume that King Abdullah will delay the naming of Second Deputy and might ask Salman to look for a heir. It is not very clear if the Allegiance Council will have a say in deciding the second in line of succession. For now, it seems to be more a deliberative and legitimizing body than with any real powers. At the same time, the new situation also raises hope for speeding up of the reform process as Prince Nayef represented the voice of Saudi conservative elements in the Royal family.

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