



[MBS Launches a Crackdown to Purge Political Rivals](#)

Earlier this week, Saudi Arabia arrested nearly 300 government officials in another sweeping crackdown on corruption under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In 2017, bin Salman arrested over 300 princes and private sector moguls under the guise of cracking down on corruption. However, the international community largely saw this as bin Salman consolidating power over his rivals instead of targeting corruption. Most of the individuals detained in 2017 were eventually released after transferring assets and money to the Saudi government. The current wave of arrests come as rumors swirl over the health of Saudi King Salman and other members of Saudi Arabia's royal family express concerns over Mohammed bin Salman's ability to lead the country.

Two of Saudi Arabia's senior princes were among the people arrested this week. Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz; who is King Salman's brother, and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef; who was previously a crown prince and interior minister. Prince bin Nayef was appointed crown prince in 2015 by King Salman, before being deposed and having the title go to Mohammed bin Salman in 2017. Officials in the United States were under the impression that MBS was behind the ouster of bin Nayef as crown prince and that he had been pressured from the highest levels of the Saudi royal family to step down. Mohammed bin Salman has long been aware of the close relations bin Nayef has with Western leaders, and he considered him a threat to his future rule. Bin Nayef's arrest seemingly confirms the West's suspicions over bin Salman's paranoia, and adds credence to the theory that the corruption drive orchestrated by MBS is more focused toward consolidating power.

Unlike the crackdown in 2017, this week's arrests have mainly targeted government officials, military personnel, and members of the judiciary. Rumors have recently been swirling in Saudi Arabia over King Salman's health and the level of support than bin Salman has from other members of the royal family. Some members of Saudi Arabia's elite have privately voiced their concern over Mohammed bin Salman's ability to handle a crisis, and those concerns were not helped by the crown prince's handling of Jamal Khashoggi's murder. Additionally, those in Saudi Arabia's military circles have criticized bin Salman's handling of the ongoing war in Yemen, and the toll it has taken on Saudi Arabia. Should the rumors be true about his father's health being in decline, bin Salman has solidified his power in Saudi Arabia by silencing the voices of dissidents close to him.

Saudi Arabia has provided very little commentary on the arrests, with its Anti-Corruption Commission only saying that it had arrested 298 individuals on charges including bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of power. During the 2017 crackdown, the arrested individuals were detained in the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton, and multiple people spoke of being physically abused during their incarceration after being released. Human Rights Watch has called on Saudi Arabia to release the legal justifications for this week's arrests, and release the individuals who are clearly being targeted for political reasons.