

VIENNA (Dispatches) -- Iran's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna has deployed "misleading" comments by some Saudi officials on Bushehr nuclear power plant, saying problems arise when technical issues become political. "As a newcomer, Saudi Arabia is developing and implementing a non-transparent nuclear program and completing the construction of its first research reactor, which is soon ready to load nuclear fuel," Kazem Gharibabadi said. "What was said by the country regarding the Bushehr nuclear power plant is far from reality and is misleading," he said.

KABUL (Dispatches) -- A day after twin inauguration ceremonies were held in Kabul by President Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah, former president Hamid Karzai in a statement called the current situation "concerning" and said it is a consequence of U.S. policies and Washington's "insulting" and "divisive" treatment of Afghans. Karzai said the proof of his claim can be seen in the statement by the US State Dept about the twin inauguration ceremonies in Kabul. He said the U.S. could have prevented divisions and political instability by making constructive and on-time moves ahead of the inauguration ceremonies if it was sincere about seeking an end to the crisis.

Assembly of Experts, Officials Urge India to Prevent Anti-Muslim Violence



Iran's Animation Goes to U.S. Kids Festival



FIFA, AFC Postpone 2022 World Cup Qualifiers



Turkey Proposes Running Syria Oilfields Jointly With Russia



Bin Salman's Paranoia Portends Downfall

By: Madawi al-Rasheed*

The silence of the Saudi royal palace over the reported arrest of senior princes Ahmed bin Abdulaziz and Muhammad bin Nayef, among others, is deafening. Yet, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's sudden and bold move is telling.

The arrest of such high-ranking princes without portfolio reveals the shaky ground on which the young prince's future rests.

In its modern history, Saudi Arabia swiftly resolved succession disputes when Crown Prince Faisal challenged the authority of King Saud in the early 1960s. But at the time Faisal had the backing of almost all the royal household, with the exception of Saud and his sons.

Faisal quickly isolated Saud and was granted a fatwa from the religious scholars to oust him.

Today, Muhammad bin Salman seems to have only the support of his old father while other members of the royal household, especially those destined to become kings, feel isolated, humiliated and now, under arrest.

The Saudi crown prince has not only alienated his own senior uncle Ahmed, and cousin Muhammad bin Nayef, but also the very establishment that would have backed the bold arrest of his own kin, namely the religious establishment. He cannot be assured of the loyalty of senior royalty, religious scholars, and important sections of Saudi society. The cheering crowds at his newly introduced festivals, concerts and boxing matches conceal a deepening crisis in the House of Saud.

A Deepening Crisis

The young prince lives in fear and isolation. His so-called top-down revolution is stumbling under the pressure of global recession that sent oil prices and local Saudi stock market shares into a slide.

In the past, austerity due to falling oil revenues was a passing stumbling block that was overcome quickly when the kingdom in previous years dealt with a series of oil crises and recessions.

But the current crisis is totally different. It is political rather than economic. King Salman may not be around long enough to cast the shadow of support and extract loyalty from disgruntled princes for his son. The son himself started his rule as the center of power with new unexpected strategies that are now insufficient to guarantee a smooth succession after the king dies.

The abrupt arrest of his own uncle and senior cousins is a risky strategy that will haunt him throughout his future political career. Moreover, the reputation of the kingdom as a country blessed by the ability of the royals to maintain consensus and smooth succession is shattered beyond repair.

The crown prince is compelled once again to use force against his royal rivals of the type witnessed in November 2017, when more than a dozen influential princes were arrested and sent to the Ritz Carlton in Riyadh. This was justified as an anti-corruption move to rid Saudi Arabia of endemic graft.

The descendants of the late King Abdullah, mainly Prince Miteb, the head of the Saudi National Guard at the time, were humiliated and sidelined. Muhammad bin Salman made sure that such a senior rival was deprived of a military base with which he could potentially stage a coup against the rising son king.

The Nayef Threat

The crown prince hopes to eliminate the threat of yet another important prince, Muhammad bin Nayef, who for a long time was considered to have managed domestic affairs with an iron fist.

The pervasive intelligence and security networks that he created when he was the central figure in the Ministry of Interior still haunt the current crown prince even after bin Nayef was deprived of all his official government posts. The crown prince fears the very draconian measures that his cousin took to crush potential opposition could yet be deployed against him.

Muhammad bin Nayef guaranteed the security of the throne in preparation for him becoming king. But he lived to see his young cousin, Muhammad, benefiting from all the surveillance and tough security he enforced in the kingdom. He was ungratefully rewarded by being abruptly sacked by the king, and now he is reportedly arrested.

News of his humiliation has travelled around the globe while the royal palace remains silent over his whereabouts.

The Al-Nayef lineage within the royal household is now facing its last days and will only be remembered as a fallen tower that kept Saudis fearful for their life under his regime, when they had been subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, and unjustified disappearances at the hands of Nayef senior, and his son Muhammad.

A Pre-Emptive Strike

Prince Ahmed, the remaining eligible brother of King Salman who could potentially succeed him, is also reported to be among the princes arrested on 7 March. He was probably seized not because of his previous military or security credentials - he had none throughout his short-lived career in government.

Marginalized princes might look to Prince Ahmed to save them from sinking into historical oblivion when the crown prince eventually becomes king.

His arrest rather was a pre-emptive strike to mitigate against the senior prince becoming a focal symbolic character around which other disgruntled princes might gather.

The potential of Prince Ahmed becoming such a figure reminds us of the ten years of King Abdullah's reign when he became the strong king who managed to counter the threats from Salman, Nayef and Sultan bin Abdulaziz at the time.

Abdullah represented a symbol for many princes who resented the monopoly of power by these three most important figures in Saudi politics. Ahmed had already expressed reservations over the policies of the new king and his son, for example, over the war on Yemen in 2015.

But since then, after his return to Saudi Arabia, he maintained his silence. Other marginalized princes might have looked to Ahmed to save them from sinking

(Continued on Page 7)

Ayatollah Khamenei: Health Defenders Dying in Line of Duty Are Martyrs



Medical staff examine coronavirus cases at Baghiyyatollah al-Azam Hospital in Tehran.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran will recognize doctors and nurses who die combating the new coronavirus as "martyrs in the line of duty" like soldiers fallen in war, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei announced Tuesday.

Across the Mideast, over 8,600 people have contracted the virus and the COVID-19 illness it causes. In Iran, the outbreak killed 54 more people on Tuesday and pushed the nation's death toll to 291.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover. In mainland China, more than 80,000 people have been diagnosed and over 58,000 have so far recovered.

On Tuesday, Iranian Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour offered new casualty figures

for the virus, which represented an 18% increase in deaths from the day before and 12% more confirmed cases. A total of 8,042 infections have been diagnosed and 2,731 patients have recovered.

Jahanpour warned figures in Iran likely will continue to rise before the Persian New Year, Nowruz, on March 20. He urged people to limit their travel, which already has been difficult for police manning checkpoints on roads between major cities. Iran has yet to take widespread quarantine decisions like China and Italy.

"The rate of spreading disease is still rising," Jahanpour told a tele-

ment in international waters.

The Trump administration will soon issue advisories which will also warn shipping vessels against turning off tracking devices in an effort to avoid US sanctions on Iran, Peyman said.

"Transponders that provide the location of vessels should never be turned off. If they are, that presents a risk that requires heightened diligence," Peyman told the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a think tank that supports tough sanctions on Iran.

The U.S. government is depicting its most draconian sanctions on Iranians as a service to them, saying their ultimate goal is to promote democracy.

On Monday, Iran's Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh said U.S. sanctions are hampering Tehran's efforts to buy food and medicine at a time when the country

(Continued on Page 7)

U.S. Moves to Further Choke Off Iran Revenues

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — The Trump administration will soon issue advisories warning shippers, port officials and insurance companies against the practice of storing Iranian oil and avoiding U.S. sanctions on Iran, a senior State Department official has said.

"We will target and designate anybody that stores Iranian oil, petrochemicals or refined petroleum in violation of U.S. sanctions, no matter where they are," said David Peyman, the deputy assistant secretary of state for counter threat finance and sanctions.

Washington is resorting to some of the most unconventional ways which include seducing ship captains into taking photos and submitting them to the U.S. government of anyone conducting ship-to-ship transfers — in other words turning them into virtual spies for the US govern-

Italy Imposes Nationwide Restrictions Europe, U.S. Emerge as New Coronavirus Hotspots

ROME (AFP) -- Italy imposed unprecedented nationwide restrictions on its 60 million people on Tuesday to control the deadly coronavirus, as China signaled major progress in its battle against the global epidemic.

The outbreak, combined with a crash in oil prices, caused carnage on financial markets, sparking the biggest losses in more than a decade -- although Asian markets recovered slightly on Tuesday and European stocks opened strongly.

The World Health Organization warned there was a "very real" threat of a pandemic but its chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the planet was "not at the mercy" of the illness, which has so far killed more than 4,000 people.

China was keen to underscore its progress in tackling the virus -- President Xi Jinping paid his first visit to the epicenter of the crisis, the city of Wuhan in Hubei province.

Officials later announced that containment measures in Hubei, whose 56 million people have been under lockdown since January, would be eased.

The provincial government said residents would be given colored health codes on a mobile app -- those with a green code in medium and low-risk areas would be allowed to travel in the province.

However, there is no indication people can leave Hubei, and the measures did not appear to loosen restrictions in Wuhan.

Figures from China showed further signs that the worst is over with officials reporting 17 deaths and 19 new infections on Tuesday, the lowest daily number of new cases since reporting began in late January.

China's apparent progress stands

(Continued on Page 7)