

Saudi Arabia: The coming of age

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Saudi Arabia has come of age in the last few years under the stewardship of Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud (known by his initials, MBS). The kingdom has started to establish itself within the Middle East as a



country with views that should be considered, listened to, understood and appreciated – despite the negative reputation it has earned in the recent past.

Saudi Arabia is now a serious player on the global stage and its influence is felt in Russia, China and throughout the Middle Eastern countries. This even extends to Iran – even though they have been at loggerheads for some time in the Yemen, where Iran has been funding the proxy war through Hezbollah and the Houties. Saudi Arabia is now considered a major Middle Eastern power, both regionally and worldwide. Its economy is the largest in the Middle East and eighteenth in the world.

Overshadowing the appeal of its robust and thriving economy is Saudi Arabia's ongoing status as an absolute monarchy. Most political rights and civil liberties are restricted and this issue will have to be addressed if the kingdom is to enjoy its new role within the region. In order to maintain power, Saudi Arabia continues to manage its security by strict control of public spending and pervasive surveillance, funded by its oil revenues. As it expands into tourism and sport (notably, golf and Formula 1), it will face mounting pressure for further freedoms.

In conjunction with Russia and in a bid to support prices, Saudi Arabia implemented further cuts to oil production. Their co-operation with Russia shows how these two leading oil producers are seeking to boost their own income, even as demand has weakened within the global economies. It shows just how strong the kingdom has become.

With some 70% of the population under the age of thirty-six and the fact that Saudi Arabia's oil resources are finite, changes are going to occur far faster than perhaps MBS had planned.

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