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My paper (for the Hoover Centre at Stanford University) on the bloodless Saudi royal succession and subsequent marginalisation of the reactionary clerical class.



The Saudi Succession And The Sociocultural-Religious Reforms Of Mohammed Bin Salman

The immensity of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's reforms in Saudi Arabia have not been adequat...

<https://www.hoover.org/research/saudi-succession-and-sociocultural-religious-reforms-mohammed-bin-salman>

Those who with 20/20 hindsight now belittle the potential for conflict in the Royal succession ignore the history of the 2nd Saudi state. Assassinations, wars between brothers/sons and foreign interventions all were the principal cause of the demise of the second Saudi state"

Critics tend to belittle the "revolution" [against the reactionary clerical class] and minimise its magnitude by describing it only as "eliminating the religious police," when in effect it was a wholesale restructuring of the role of the clerical establishment in Saudi society...

.....from virtually co-manager of society to marginal player. The West only effected this sort of change after hundreds of years of turmoil, blood and violence towards its clerics

It is true that these reforms took place with coercion and led to the arrest of hundreds of potentially rebellious and politically ambitious clerics, but none were killed, and active armed action has not been necessary.

The coercive actions taken by the government have brought upon the Kingdom extensive criticism from human rights organisations. Human rights are of course absolute and should not in principle be open to any compromise. However, rulers have to balance multiple goals.....

.....like maintaining public order + preventing potential insurrections even if they conflict with human rights norms. American critics of Riyadh should remember how even President Lincoln suspended the right to habeas corpus in the face of the insurrection of the southern states

MBS took the big risk that majority public opinion would support his bold reforms, although

conventional wisdom held that such changes were decades away from being accepted in a society that was seen as overwhelmingly ultraconservative

KSA is a difficult place in which to gauge public opinion given the fact that polling is still in its nascence so one has to look instead for anecdotal evidence. Massive youth participation in public entertainment given youth are the majority is an important indicator.

Another evidentiary point is the lack of any public disturbances. Critics attribute this to KSA being a “police state.” [Maybe so] but a mild one. People forget that the even brutal police states, such as Syria, were not able to prevent the people coming out into the street....

So, the fact that public protests have been virtually nonexistent in Saudi Arabia is an indicator of note allowing us to conclude that the absence of protests against the reforms probably indicates that they have widespread support

Saudi youth have realized that they want to have fun, go to concerts, meet members of the opposite sex, and not drown in fundamentalist anger and bitterness while awaiting the afterlife.

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