

A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 184 | 9 NOVEMBER 2017

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Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman continues to assert his authority in his ultra-conservative nation.

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During the 19th Communist Party Congress, Xi Jinping was elevated to the status of Mao, and expanded on his vision for China.

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President el-Sisi discussed a wide range of topics with a US delegation of Christian Evangelicals in an historic meeting.

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PROJECT CEDAR TREE supports work among the 1.5 million refugees in Lebanon.



THE NUMBERS:

SAUDI ARABIA



1979

The year in which the Grand Mosque in Mecca was overrun by rebels for 15 days



32

The age of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, heir to the throne



\$500 billion

The proposed backing for the futuristic desert city of Neom



11

The number of princes arrested in the anti-corruption crackdown, along with 38 ministers and businessmen

SAUDI'S CROWN PRINCE ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY



By Donnelly McClelland

Saudi Arabia's future king has tightened his grip on power through an anti-corruption purge by arresting royals, ministers and investors including billionaire Alwaleed bin Talal who is one of the kingdom's most prominent businessmen. *(Reuters)*

Mohammed bin Salman's meteoric rise

The weekend's lightning arrests of a host of powerful officials and wealthy businessmen in a supposed crackdown on corruption is being viewed by many analysts as a way for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to consolidate power. The 32-year-old prince has made a meteoric rise from relative obscurity to King Salman's direct heir and top advisor. He was virtually unheard of outside Saudi royal circles three years ago, but in June this year, he was anointed crown prince in the absolute monarchy in the most radical shake-up of the kingdom's succession process in decades. His promotion meant that he leapfrogged his elder, more experienced cousin, Mohammed bin Nayef. He now only answers to his ailing 81-year-old father, King Salman. Mohammed Alyahya, a non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council, said the following to the *Financial Times*: "Today, foreign policy, defence matters and issues of social change are all under Prince Mohammed's control. And he will probably have this wide-ranging executive power for many decades to come."

The crown prince is personally overseeing the anti-corruption push, which was announced just a few hours before the first arrests were made. A Saudi government official with close ties to security says 11 princes and 38 others are being held in five-star hotels across the capital, Riyadh.

Among younger Saudis, who generally embrace his new agendas, the prince is popular. The hashtag "The king battles corruption" trended on Twitter as many users welcomed the move. However, his liberal vision has sparked criticism not only from the kingdom's Sunni Muslim ultra-conservative religious establishment (traditionally a pillar of the rule of the Al Sauds), but also from ordinary Saudis who have felt the pinch of his economic changes in their wallets.

Vision 2030 and a more 'moderate' future?

Vision 2030 is the prince's flagship reform drive, which looks to modernise the ultra-conservative nation and wean it off its dependency on petrodollars. The prince's plan involves a unilateral rewriting of the kingdom's social contract that offered a cradle-to-grave welfare state in exchange for political allegiance and acceptance of Sunni ultra-conservative moral and social codes. Cost-cutting and revenue-raising measures have included major reductions in housing, vacation and sickness benefits and reduced salaries in the public sector, the country's largest employer, by up to a third.

Almost two weeks ago, Riyadh hosted some of the world's leading power brokers as the prince showcased his vision for a post-oil future. He also vowed to return the country to "moderate Islam" and asked for global support to transform the hard-line kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and lures investors. In an interview with the *Guardian*, he said that the ultra-conservative state had been "not normal" for the past 30 years, blaming the rigid doctrines that governed society in reaction to the Iranian revolution, which successive leaders "didn't know how to deal with".

The keys to the Saudi Kingdom

The prince's assessment of the root of Saudi Arabia's lack of normality is, however, displaced – there was another key event, shrouded in secrecy, which also occurred some 30-plus years ago and shaped Saudi Arabia's future.

The 1979 Grand Mosque siege was the Al Saud family's most destabilising and embarrassing

NEWS HEADLINES



Nearly 20% of high school and university students in **Indonesia** support the establishment of a caliphate in the world's largest Muslim-majority country over the current secular government, a new survey showed. Indonesia has in recent years seen its longstanding reputation for religious tolerance come under pressure as hard-line Islamic groups increase their influence in public and political life. Nearly a quarter of students said they were, to varying degrees, ready to wage jihad to achieve a caliphate.



The **Iraqi** government dismissed a call from US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for Iranian-backed paramilitary units that helped Baghdad defeat the IS to end operations in Iraq. He said it was time for the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation forces and their Iranian advisers to "go home". Washington, which backed Baghdad against the IS, is concerned Iran will use its expanded presence in Iraq and in Syria to expand its influence in the region. But President Abadi showed unwillingness to meet Tillerson's demand.



A family dispute may have sparked the rampage by a **US** Air Force veteran who killed 26 people with an assault rifle in a small-town church, the deadliest mass shooting in Texas history. The attack during the Sunday morning service came just five weeks after the massacre in Las Vegas.

moment in their history. A Saudi king's legitimacy and prestige rests on the fact that he is the custodian of Islam's two holy shrines, in Mecca and Medina. During the dawn prayer of 20 November 1979, the Grand Mosque in Mecca (Islam's holiest site) was lost to a band of rebels who held it for two long weeks, and Riyadh had to rely on clandestine members of the Pakistani and French special forces to regain control. Those who seized the Grand Mosque were angered at what they saw as Saudi society's plunge into immorality. They proclaimed that the ruling Al Saud dynasty had lost its legitimacy because it was corrupt, ostentatious and had destroyed Saudi culture by an aggressive policy of Westernisation.

The ruling family's ties with Islamic fundamentalism had long been one of the pillars upholding the House of Saud. Their most notable, long-standing relationship was with Wahhabi clerics and their followers. Stephen Rakowski, an analyst for *Stratfor*, says: "Members of the sect gave the kingdom's founding monarch, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, the decisive edge in his ambitious campaign to unify vast tracts of the Arabian Peninsula under his rule after World War I."

But their greatest influence arose from the Grand Mosque siege. Yaroslav Trofimov, author of the book *The Siege of Mecca*, explained in a *Rediff* interview in 2007: "In order to storm the Grand Mosque in 1979, the Saudi government needed a fatwa from the leading Islamic clerics, the Wahhabi ulema. The clerics obliged – on the condition that the kingdom become much more rigid in enforcing the Wahhabi brand of Islam. As part of this grand bargain, millions of dollars in Saudi petrodollars started to flow all over the world to fund the clerics' effort to spread Wahhabi

Islam – creating the Islamic madrassas, charities and welfare groups." The ultra-conservative teachings of Wahhabi Islam have been seen by many as a breeding ground for extremism around the world.

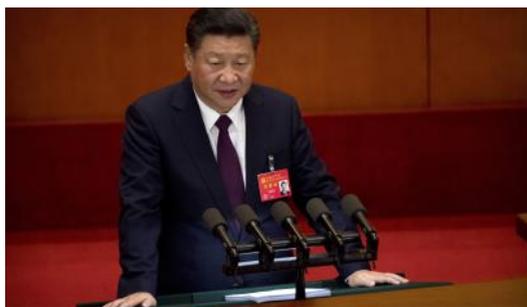
FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

It remains to be seen whether the crown prince's pledge of a "moderate Islam open to the world and all religions" will become a reality or whether it is mere 'window dressing' to attract foreign investment to bolster his ambitious dreams. What is undeniable, however, is that under his influence, Saudi Arabia has become embroiled in a war with Yemen, a diplomatic row with Qatar, and an increasingly hostile war of words with Iran. Alexander Mercouris wrote in *The Duran*: "The rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman – inexperienced and reckless as he has repeatedly shown himself to be – is possibly the single most dangerous and destabilising development in the current already fraught international situation, with ramifications which go far beyond the confines of the Gulf and the Middle East."

Daniel 2:21 states, "He removes kings and sets up kings..." – a reminder that the Lord could use this apparently "reckless" and "impulsive" king-to-be to achieve His purposes in the Middle East. It could result in the opening-up of a once-closed country, or it could lead to all-out conflict between the powerful Sunni and Shiite powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran, or the ultra-conservative clerics and their supporters may look to cut his rule short. He is certainly a man to watch.

PRAY > For the Crown Prince to be an instrument of lasting change, in the Lord's hand > For greater opportunities for the Gospel to be spread

XI JINPING'S VISION FOR A PROSPEROUS CHINA



By Andrew Richards

Chinese President Xi Jinping opened a critical Communist Party Congress with a pledge to build a "modern socialist country" for a "new era" that will be proudly Chinese, steadfastly ruled by the party but open to the world. The twice-a-decade congress, a week-long, mostly closed-door conclave, culminated with the selection of a new Politburo Standing Committee that will rule China's 1.4 billion people for the next five years, with Xi consolidating his grasp on power. Xi promised, in what was likely an indirect reference to US President Donald Trump's "America first" policy, that China would be fully engaged with the world, and reiterated pledges to tackle climate change. Xi envisioned China developing into a "basically" modernised socialist country by 2035, becoming one of the world's most innovative

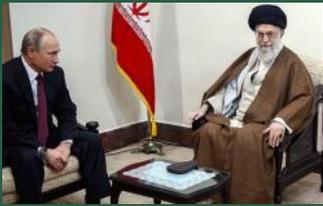
countries with the income gap between urban and rural residents significantly reduced, and its environmental woes fundamentally eliminated. By 2050, Xi said, China would become a modern socialist "strong power" with leading influence on the world stage. (*Reuters*)

A new era for China?

Xi Jinping's speech, pregnant with limitless possibilities for the future of China, propelled China onto the world stage like never before. In 2010, while still ascending the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party, Mr Xi was labelled by the *Economist* as "the next emperor". Today, seven years later, Mr Xi is not only the Party General Secretary, Chairman of the Central Military Commission and the President of the People's Republic of China, but also, according to the *Economist*, the world's most powerful man. He has led China into a new era of economic prosperity and opened the country to foreign markets and investment like no leader before him, with the outflow being the elevation of the Chinese economy to the second largest in the world.

During Mr Xi's speech at the 19th Party Congress, he not only envisioned a more open China (economy) by means of reducing barriers to foreign investment and a level playing field for all registered companies in China, but also reaffirmed the re-establishment of full

NEWS HEADLINES



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told Russian President Vladimir Putin that Tehran and Moscow needed to step up cooperation to isolate the US and restore peace in the Middle East, Iranian state TV reported.



Two years after militants killed 130 people in coordinated attacks across Paris, France officially ended a state of emergency, replacing it with the introduction of a new security law which critics say undermines civil liberties. The new anti-terrorism law, effective from 1 November, gives police extended powers to search properties, conduct electronic eavesdropping and shut mosques or other locations suspected of preaching hatred.



Sayfullo Saipov, the Uzbek immigrant behind New York's worst attack in 16 years confessed to acting in the name of the Islamic State group and "felt good" about the killings, having planned an assault for a year. Vehicle rammings have become a frequent tactic deployed by IS sympathisers in the West, including in Barcelona, London, Stockholm and in Nice, where a Tunisian suicide truck bomber killed 86 people on Bastille Day last year.

Party control over every aspect of society. However, amidst all the boasts and applause for a new China that will not only change Asia but impact the world, very few are asking why Mr Xi is driving China to its future destination of becoming a world superpower.

The Chinese Dream

"The Chinese Dream", viewed as a call for China's rising international influence, rides on the backbone of its century of humiliation at the hands of foreign powers between 1839-1949. Once a ruling power in its own right, China for centuries enjoyed a seat of absolute power in East Asia, with limited contact with the rest of the world. Outside trade with China was severely limited during the 1800s, but the trade of opium provided a key to opening China up to the rest of the world. According to Greg Caskey, Historical Economics Instructor at Delaware Military Academy, the "long century" of 110 years opened in 1839, when Britain sent gunboats up the Yangtze River to compel China's rulers to open their ports and markets to the opium trade, at the beginning of what came to be known as the First Opium War. This experience and interaction with other Western nations over the following century made similar demands for trade access, and marked China's first sustained exposure to the West, while highlighting imperial China's military and diplomatic weakness in the face of Western power.

According to the Chinese government, the century of humiliation ended when the Chinese Communist Party won the civil war and established itself as the ruling regime in 1949. Mao Zedong, aware of China's second-rate status compared to the West, initiated China's "Great Leap Forward" that was intended to transform the country into a socialist society through industrialisation and collective farming. Taking Xi Jinping's three-and-a-half-hour speech apart, it's easy to see where his inspiration came from: a desire to wipe away the shame of humiliation.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Xi Jinping said in his speech, "government, military, society and schools, north, south, east and west – the party is the leader of all" – that would include the Church, registered or underground. It comes as no surprise that the Chinese government has tried over the past few years to force unregistered house churches to register with the government, with church buildings being torn down and crosses removed from steeples of churches not yet registered. Mr Xi believes that to maintain a strong and influential Communist Party that is able to withstand Western influences, uniting churches under Communist Party leadership is necessary to maintain internal harmony. The Communist Party is wary of hostile foreign forces that may use religion as a tool to destabilise their government.

According to *Christianity Today*, the Communist Party's control over religion is to be exerted not only through law, but also by reconciling religious doctrine with the party's socialist values. While "religion serving socialism" has been in the Party's lexicon for some time, direct intervention in the beliefs and practices of individual religions – including calls for the "Sinification" of Christian theology – have become more common under Mr Xi.

Joann Pittman, Senior Vice President of *ChinaSource*, suggests that the Chinese house church movement will suffer most under Mr Xi's proposed "new era": "The re-establishment of Party control over every aspect of society will have the biggest impact on the religious sphere, as the Party reiterates its stance that religions must serve the Party. House churches are one of the last sectors of society that are actually outside of Party control; something the Party increasingly sees as intolerable."

PRAY > For China's leaders to focus on their people's upliftment, not repression > For Chinese believers as they continue to grow in maturity and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT MEETS US EVANGELICALS



By Conrad Bornman

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi met with a group of leading evangelical Christian activists from the United States at his office in Cairo last week [November 1], where they discussed the fight against [the Islamic State], the prospects for peace between Israel and the Arab world, and the situation of Christians in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. (*Haaretz*)

Stretching out a hand

This was the first ever US delegation of evangelical Christian leaders for a meeting with the

Egyptian president, which was scheduled as a one-hour meeting but lasted almost three hours. Dr Andrea Zaki, head of the Protestant Churches of Egypt, was also present.

The meeting demonstrates the president's interest in strengthening the bridges of communication and understanding with one of the largest and most influential Christian groups in America. He also used the opportunity to emphasise Egypt's openness to all religions and sectors. The meeting was initiated by Joel Rosenberg, a prominent evangelical and renowned author, who had, earlier in the year, participated in a meeting that Mr Sisi held in Washington with experts on the Middle East, leaders of Jewish organisations and former senior US government officials.

Rebranding of Egypt

These recent meetings highlight the president's determination to rebrand Egypt as "a trustworthy and stable American and Western ally" amidst the political chaos and instability of the region. Egypt's

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reputation, especially towards the Western world, was severely strained by the Arab Spring of 2011 and the subsequent rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood's Muhammed Mursi.

The Arab Spring saw the Egyptian people rise up against their then president, Hosni Mubarak, who they believed was resisting true democracy and personal freedom. But Muhammed Mursi and the radical Muslim Brotherhood hijacked the popular revolution, seeing it as an opportunity to seize power and dominate Egypt's political scene. The Muslim Brotherhood (founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928), a radical Islamic organisation, had been trying to seize power in Egypt since the 1920s. They intended to steer the country in a more radical Islamic direction, imposing Sharia law and making life even more difficult for all non-Muslims.

Roughly ten percent of Egypt's 94 million people are Coptic Christians, the largest Christian community in the Middle East. In the year that Egypt was ruled by Muhammed Mursi (under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood), a full-scale campaign of terror against Egypt's Christian minority gained momentum. Brotherhood leaders incited their followers to attack Christian homes, shops, schools and churches throughout the country. These continued after Mr Mursi's removal by then-Field Marshal el-Sisi and the Egyptian military, as the Muslim Brotherhood supporters chose to heap blame on the Copts for the removal of their leader. One Egyptian scholar described these attacks as the worst violence against the Coptic Church since the 14th century.

When Mursi was ousted by a military coup (requested by 20-30 million signatures of the Tamarud Movement) in July 2013, Coptic Christians rejoiced. They saw Mr Sisi as a saviour. His efforts focused on restoring order on the streets, re-establishing national stability and beginning the difficult task of rebuilding investor confidence.

Coptic Christians' waning support

Mr Sisi's failure to address longstanding injustices perpetrated against Copts, however, has led to disillusionment. Many Copts feel that the president has failed to deliver on his promise of equality he made four years ago. In recent weeks, Coptic

Christians in Egypt's Minya governorate have seen a number of their churches closed by police following harassments and attacks by Muslim villagers. A Pentecostal church in Minya, however, reopened its doors on Sunday 29 October, after 22 years without a permit, a move some see as a goodwill gesture from the government ahead of the planned visit of US Vice President Mike Pence in December.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Dr Zaki told *CBN News* about the time with Mr Sisi: "A fantastic meeting, sharing the hopes, the dreams, the challenges facing evangelicals here: how they look to the future, how they can together build a coalition for the Kingdom of God. The meeting was very prophetic and very inspiring." He went on to say: "We are an emerging Church, a growing Church. We have confidence in God and we are working together to bring the Kingdom of God. We are pro-stability, co-existence, respecting the others; we are pro-building the Kingdom of God by inviting people to come to Jesus, but also building co-existence and peace."

Joel Rosenberg told *Haaretz* that he was surprised at the level of interest expressed by the Egyptians in the delegation. "For the leader of Egypt to invite a Christian group to sit with him, discuss what he's doing, talk about some of the difficult issues, that's very impressive. I was hoping we could get ten minutes with him, and eventually we got almost three hours. From our side, the important thing was to show our appreciation for his fight against terrorism and extremism, for his commitment to peace and security ties with Israel, and for saving Egypt from the darkness of the Muslim Brotherhood."

Those who attended the meeting with Mr Sisi came away convinced of his determination to rebuild Egypt's shattered economy, safeguard all Egyptians (including the nation's Christians), rebuild churches destroyed or damaged during the Arab Spring, maintain the peace treaty with Israel, and rebuild the US-Egyptian alliance. Mr Sisi and his government, however, face many challenges and need prayer. He specifically asked the delegation that they pray for him and all Egyptians.

PRAY > For Mr Sisi and his leadership to make Godly decisions for Egypt > For Egyptian believers to be key change-makers in their nation

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



PROJECT CEDAR TREE

Supporting work among refugees in Lebanon

In Lebanon, there are more than 1.5 million refugees from Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan living in tent camps, slums and informal dwellings. More than 90% are Muslims and are seeking hope and peace. More than 50% are children with little or no hope of being educated, often working in fields to help support their families. Most lack the basic necessities.

Project Cedar Tree supports these refugees in various ways, including: training, children's education, emotional support, counselling and providing basic necessities.

To make a financial contribution, please make use of the INcontext bank account details and use CEDAR and your email address (or part of it) as your reference.

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