



Political Islam Online

The Kingdom's New Judicial System and the Battle of the "Reformists"

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This morning, The Saudi King adopted some of the reformists' call for the restructuring and the empowering of the Judiciary as a more powerful independent establishment in the Kingdom. Details of the new judicial system were spelled out this morning and include a Supreme Judiciary Council which includes a Supreme Court and a separate Grievances Council, to address administrative complaints as an independent legal entity directly reporting to the King.



The King signing the Royal Decree

Reviewing several articles in the Arab press, [PI Online](#) believes that while this is a result of the mounting number of disgruntled Saudi citizens questioning injustices perpetrated by royal princes and by the religious and civil administrations, it is equally the product of a King who seems to favor at least some of the changes championed by a relentless group of reformists, some of them jailed¹ and their unusual ally in Prince *Talal Ibn 'Abd-el-'Aziz Al-Saud*². The prince this past month had called the reformists members jailed "conscientious prisoners" rather than criminals, threatened to establish a political party inside the Kingdom, and welcomed the reformists to join in.



[PI Online](#) is following in the Arab media this still unfolding political struggle between the rebel maverick prince, the reformists and the most powerful group of princes known as the *Sudeiri*³ group, whom prince *Talal* seemed to have referred to when he called on "breaking the monopolizing power of certain members of the governing family".

Prince Talal While the King did not address the constitutional issue, he may have adopted the best course of action in implementing a major reform without totally offending his powerful half brothers or directly touching their power. **The religious establishment however did not fare as well. It is worth noting that while the new established reform clearly states that the Judiciary is to govern in accordance with the Muslim *Shari'a*, the established supreme Judiciary Council did not include members from any religious organization.**

While probably not totally opposed by principle to the reform, It also remains to be seen what price the *Sudeiri* Group have extracted from the King for their acquiescence to the new system; one possibility may be that those who have advocated these changes the most will pay for it. Unless the King personally signals otherwise, prince *Talal* may be further sidelined and the Reformists' activities further curtailed for now. For the Kingdom it is however a bold and welcomed change.

Sources:

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¹ A group of nine reformists are still in jail since February, despite recent petition by their colleagues. It remains to be seen if the King will order their release or will let the newly established Judiciary deal with the issue.

² Since the sixties, the maverick Prince has advocated the creation of a constitution limiting the rights of the Monarch and identifying citizen's rights. Exiled to Nasser's Egypt then, he was pardoned by King *Faysal* and came back to the Kingdom on condition not to engage in politics. He was however made part again of the council of Princes and is believed to have the ears of the king. He is also known as the father of Prince *Al-Walid Ibn Talal*, considered one of the wealthiest people.

³ The Sudeiris are the seven full brothers born to the late King *Abdul 'Aziz* wife and their common mother *Hassa bint Ahmad Al-Sudeiri*. They include the defense minister *Sultan*, the interior minister *Nayef* and the governor of Riyadh *Salman*.