

## MEDIA ALERT

The logo for The Economist, featuring the words "The Economist" in white serif font on a red rectangular background.

### ***The Economist's 1843 magazine profile of Muhammad bin Salman, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, reveals a volatile, video-game playing millennial autocrat***

*"MBS: despot in the desert" by Middle East correspondent Nicolas Pelham is the lead story in The Economist's summer-reading supplement for the special double issue*

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM — July 28th 2022 — The first-ever summer double issue of *The Economist*, online today and including articles from *1843 magazine*, features Nicolas Pelham's deeply researched and widely sourced portrait of Prince Muhammad bin Salman, commonly known by his initials MBS, the despot of oil-rich Saudi Arabia:

<https://www.economist.com/1843/2022/07/28/mbs-despot-in-the-desert>

Pelham, *The Economist's* Middle East correspondent, has covered the region for 30 years. The article reveals hitherto unreported details depicting the arc of MBS's rise from a lonely schoolboy to the most powerful person in the kingdom. MBS has been lauded for launching a social revolution, most obviously by granting more rights to women and disempowering the religious police. But as Pelham writes, embracing Western consumer culture and easing social mores hasn't meant embracing Western democratic values: it can as easily support a distinctively modern surveillance state. At 36, MBS could be in power for decades. What does this mean for the world?

The West relies on Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter of crude oil. Yet as Pelham writes, "A kingdom where the word of one man counts for so much depends utterly on his character." He chronicles MBS's ascent from marginalised son of his father's third wife to volatile ruler with a violent streak. His excesses include detaining hundreds of royals and businessmen in the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Riyadh for weeks in 2017 until they handed over a combined total of around \$100bn. Rights groups reckon that thousands of people in Saudi Arabia have been imprisoned. Most infamously, in 2018 Saudi officials murdered *Washington Post* correspondent Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey. A CIA report said MBS approved the operation.

Many Western leaders ostracised MBS after Khashoggi's murder. But since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 – and sent crude prices rocketing – MBS is back in demand. President Biden, who had previously vowed to turn Saudi Arabia into a "pariah", went to Riyadh in July and fist-bumped the crown prince in greeting. Watching the West come begging is a moment of triumph for MBS. This gripping piece asks what the millennial autocrat may do with that power.

Award-winning writer Nicolas Pelham spoke to dozens of people for this piece, including senior officials in Saudi Arabia.

[“MBS: despot in the desert”](#) is the lead story in *The Economist*'s summer double issue, featuring stories from *The Economist*'s award-winning *1843* magazine.

**Further reading from *The Economist*:** [“How to deal with despots: Western foreign policy sets out to be ethical, but often ends up being ineffectual”](#)

If you would like to interview *The Economist*'s Middle East correspondent, Nicolas Pelham, please contact: [HollyDonahue@economist.com](mailto:HollyDonahue@economist.com) (UK / rest of world), [TomAmos@economist.com](mailto:TomAmos@economist.com) (US)

#### **About *The Economist***

With a growing global audience and a reputation for insightful analysis and perspective on every aspect of world events, *The Economist* is one of the most widely recognised and well-read current-affairs publications in the world. In addition to the weekly print and digital editions and website, *The Economist* publishes Espresso, a daily news app, and Global Business Review, a bilingual English-Chinese product. It produces The Intelligence, a daily current-affairs podcast, as well as other weekly podcasts and videos. *The Economist* has more than 58m social-media followers.

#### **About *1843* magazine**

*1843* magazine is part of *The Economist*, publishing long-form narrative journalism and named for the year *The Economist* was founded. *1843*'s award-winning features explore the enduring issues of our age from a human dimension, and emphasises the importance of visual storytelling as much as the written word. For more information go to [economist.com/1843](http://economist.com/1843)