

[\(Arabic Version\)](#)

[\(Japanese Version\)](#)

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Telephone call between Saudi Crown Prince and Japanese PM Abe confirms impatience of Muhammad



On March 7, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (called MbS for short) and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held a telephone call for about 15 minutes. According to the press release of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in Japan¹, both countries confirmed to promote the "Japan Saudi Vision 2030," and cooperate each other for the G20 Summit which would be held in Osaka this June and in Saudi Arabia next year respectively. The Saudi media reported similar news². In Japan the Jiji Press made the report in simple but added of the comment by MOFA that Khashoggi's murder case in last October was not referred in the telephone conversation. This was the difference between Saudi and Japanese media³.

It was not clear that which side offered the telephone talks primarily and what kind of atmosphere it was. However, the latest articles in local newspapers show that the isolated MbS at home and abroad is now quite irresistible. It could be found that MbS is looking for the chance of recovery by the telephone call with Prime Minister Abe. The following is a guess by the author after analyzing the article of the local newspapers.

About the question which side the meeting was proposed from Japan or Saudi Arabia, Saudi local newspaper reported that "Crown Prince received the call from Prime Minister Abe". It can be read as if the Japanese side proposed the telephone call ahead of Saudi Arabia. But Prime Minister Abe so far had no urgent problems to confer with Saudi leaders (except if there were any confidential subject which the Foreign Ministry could not disclose). On the other hand, MbS has been isolated and without support from international arena due to the Khashoggi case. Incidentally he could achieve no remarkable results from the visits to India and China just performed few weeks ago⁴. His vision 2030, too big to materialize, began to show its defects. It seems to be true that MbS is considerably impatient now. Taking the situation into consideration, it would be natural to think that telephone call was offered from MbS side to ask cooperation of Japan.

Currently MbS's biggest concern is Vision 2030. The path to realize the target cannot be found out. Original timetable is completely in delay. For instance, Saudi Aramco's IPO, which is inevitable to fund the Vision 2030, is also postponed two years later without specific schedule⁵. Furthermore,

foreign investment and technology transfer, which are essential to diversify economy and to upgrade domestic industry, have hardly been realized.

There are two reasons that foreign investors hesitate to invest in Saudi Arabia. One reason is that MbS arrested and detained his political opponents and influential businessmen in November 2017. He arrested them in the name of corruption. As a result, most of businessmen in Saudi Arabia have become wary of MbS. The second reason is the Khashoggi's murder case in last October. Both public and private sector in international society is convinced that MbS was directly involved in the case. Due to these reasons, foreign investors cannot accelerate their business in Saudi Arabia. They are afraid that their government, shareholders and consumers do not appreciate their investment in Saudi Arabia. The avoidance of MbS at home and abroad is steaming up.

His official visits to India and China seemed to have failed in terms of attracting money and technology for Vision 2030. Both countries strongly need Saudi oil. So bilateral energy relations have been strengthened in agreements to establish a refinery joint venture⁶. However, nothing has been realized manufacturing projects with Indian firms or infrastructure projects with Chinese entity in Saudi Arabia. The latter is related to China's "One-Belt-One-Road Initiative" MbS had been reported to visit Korea and two other Southeast Asian countries in addition to India and China⁷. But it seemed to be cancelled. MbS might judge that no fruits could be get by these additional visits. MbS is a person who has pay little respect to the counterparts. He is always selfish.

MbS has lost his reputation in the diplomatic scene due to his selfish and arrogant behavior in the Khashoggi's case. When he attended the Buenos Aires G20 Summit in December last year, he had very few individual meetings with Western leaders. And at the first EU-Arab Summit in Cairo, Egypt, in February this year, King Salman attended the meeting⁸. For this meeting, MbS would be the most appropriate person to participate as the representative of the Kingdom. German Prime Minister Merkel is the spearhead of anti-MbS. She stopped exporting weapons such as tanks for Saudi Arabia immediately after the Khashoggi's case. She had no meeting with MbS at G20.

King Salman himself, who is fond of one-on-one negotiations, is not good at summit of multilateral diplomacy. The King had very weak presence at EU-Arab Summit. The King had to expect that MbS stood on the stage of the Summit as his representative. But King himself had to participate to Summit despite his bad health condition because reputation of MbS was too bad. King Salman, who could not entrust MbS on diplomacy, replaced the foreign minister from Al-Jubeir who was obedient subordinates of MbS to veteran ex-finance minister Assaf⁹. In the tour to India and China MbS focused his aim to the deal in the economic field. But as stated earlier, Vision 2030 showed a lack of momentum regardless his visit to both countries.

The scenario of MbS was summarized as follows; MbS eventually relied on Japanese prime minister who could not say "no" to Saudi Arabia as a crude oil supplier. On the economic side,

MbS asked Japan to encourage specific actions for Vision 2030. On the diplomatic side, at the upcoming Osaka G20 Summit in June, he expects that Prime Minister Abe will introduce him to the Western leaders as the host of next year's Summit. The soul of MbS is seen through.

Your comment on this matter would be highly appreciated.

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¹ 「安倍総理大臣とムハンマド・サウジアラビア皇太子との電話会談」 3/7 日外務省発表。

https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/me_a/me2/sa/page4_004805.html

² 'Saudi crown prince receives telephone call from Japan's Shinzo Abe', 2019/3/8, Arab News

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1463766/saudi-arabia>

³ 「安倍首相、サウジ皇太子と電話会談＝記者殺害には触れず」, 3/7 時事オンラインニュース

<https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2019030701091&g=pol>

⁴ 'Future opportunities between Saudi Arabia and China are very big: crown prince' 2019/2/22, Arab News

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1456356/saudi-arabia>

⁵ 'Al-Falih confirms Saudi Aramco IPO expected within two years', 2019/3/7, Arab News

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1462771/business-economy>

⁶ 'Future opportunities between Saudi Arabia and China are very big: crown prince' 2019/2/22, Arab News

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1456356/saudi-arabia>

⁷ 'Saudi Crown Prince starts Asia trip pledging \$20b for Pakistan' 2019/2/18, Gulf News

<https://gulfnews.com/business/saudi-crown-prince-starts-asia-trip-pledging-20b-for-pakistan-1.62146620>

⁸ 'Arab, European leaders vow new era of cooperation', 2019', 2019/2/26, Arab News

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1458161/middle-east>

⁹ 「サウジアラビア閣僚名簿(2019年2月24日現在)」参照。

<http://menadabase.maeda1.jp/4-1-1SaudiCabinet.pdf>