



# The most dangerous man in the world?

When Mohammed bin Salman was just 12 he began sitting in on meetings led by his father Salman, the then governor of Saudi Arabia's Riyadh Province. Some 17 years later, at 29 and already the world's youngest defence minister, he plunged his country into a brutal war in Yemen with no end in sight.

Now the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is jousting dangerously with its regional foe Iran, led by a man seemingly in a big hurry to become the Middle East's most powerful leader.

Unlike his older half-brothers, MbS, as he is known, did not go abroad to university, choosing to remain in Riyadh where he attended King Saud University, graduating in law.

Associates considered him an earnest young man who neither smoked nor drank and had no interest in partying.

When Salman ascended the Saudi throne in January 2015, he was already ailing and relying heavily on his son.

Aged 79, the King is reported to be suffering from dementia and able to concentrate for only a few hours in a day. As his father's gatekeeper, MbS, now the country's defence minister, is the real power in the kingdom.

His fight against corruption and bureaucracy has captured the admiration of young Saudis. But the same zeal with which he is pursuing economic reforms has also led Saudi Arabia into a messy war in neighbouring Yemen.

It must have seemed a very good idea at the time. It sent a strong message to both his rival and supporters. The plan was to win a quick, decisive victory to confirm his stature as a military leader.

But thus far Operation Decisive Storm has proved anything but trouble. The war has dragged on for close to a year, causing infinite misery to the people of Yemen.

Where the good in his impetuous nature may come undone is over the growing struggle with Iran for regional hegemony. When MbS announced the formation of a council of 34 Muslim nations in mid-December to combat terrorism, he clearly had Iran in mind.

Now, with the Saudis executing the senior Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a tit-for-tat battle is escalating. The Iranians allowed the ransacking of the Saudi embassy in Tehran, and the Saudis together with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states withdrew their ambassadors in retaliation.

The apparent bombing of the Iranian embassy in Sanaa has further ratcheted up tensions.

In a widely circulated letter last summer, enemies within the ruling family decried the arrogance of the young prince, even going so far as to call for his ousting along with his father.

But those calls have led nowhere and MbS continues to ride a crest of popular support in Saudi Arabia. The question remains, though, how far his impetuous nature will take him in the conflict with Iran.

A serious economic crisis added with fear of losing regional dominance might prove to be a serious challenge for him. It is not outside the realm of possibility that this brilliant, brash young man casting himself in his grandfather's mould as a Sunni warrior may be weighing up the options, may be thinking of a military strike against Shia Iran - a frightening thought in a region already riven by sectarian war.

# 'Gaddafi made mistake by giving up nuke'

## Says N Korea; slams South's propaganda

AFP, Seoul

North Korea has defended its latest nuclear test, citing the fate of two toppled Middle East leaders, while flexing its military muscle by showing TV footage of a submarine-launched missile test.

A commentary published by the official KCNA news agency late Friday said the fate of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya showed what happened when countries forsake their nuclear weapon ambitions.

It also warned South Korea, which resumed high-decibel propaganda broadcasts across the inter-Korean border in response to Wednesday's test, that its actions were driving the divided peninsula to "the brink of war".

The commentary said Pyongyang's fourth nuclear test was a "great event" that provided North Korea with a deterrent powerful enough to secure its borders against all hostile forces, including the United States.

"History proves that powerful nuclear deterrence serves as the strongest treasured sword for frustrating outsiders' aggression," it said.

North Korea said the test was of a miniaturised hydrogen bomb -- a claim largely dismissed by experts who argue the yield was far too low for a full-fledged thermonuclear device.

"The Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the Gaddafi regime in Libya could not escape the fate of destruction after being deprived of their foundations for nuclear development and giving up nuclear programmes of their own accord," the commentary said.

Both had made the mistake, the commentary argued, of yielding to Western pressure led by a United States bent on regime change.

Asking North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons was as pointless as "wishing to see the sky fall", it said, adding that the entire country was proud of its "H-bomb of justice".

# COP21 deal a 'false hope'

## Leading academics say pact too weak to avert catastrophe

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Paris Agreement to tackle global warming has actually dealt a major setback to the fight against climate change, leading academics warned.

The deal may have been trumpeted by world leaders but is far too weak to do help prevent devastating harm to the Earth, it is claimed.

In a joint letter to The Independent, some of the world's top climate scientists launch a blistering attack on the deal, warning that it offers "false hope" that could ultimately prove to be counter-productive in the battle to curb global warming.

The letter, which carries eleven signatures including professors Peter Wadhams and Stephen Salter, of the universities of Cambridge and Edinburgh, warns that the Paris Agreement is dangerously inadequate.

Because of the Paris failure, the academics say the world's only chance of saving itself from rampant global warming is a giant push into controversial and largely untested geo-engineering technologies that seek to cool the planet by manipulating the Earth's climate system.

"The hollow cheering of success at the end of the Paris Agreement proved yet again that people will hear what they want to hear and disregard the rest. What they disregarded were the deadly flaws lying just beneath its veneer of success," the academics write in the letter, also signed by

Dr Alan Gadian of the University of Leeds and Professor Paul Beckwith of the University of Ottawa in Canada.

The authors don't dispute the huge diplomatic achievement of the Paris Agreement - getting 195 world leaders to sign up to a global warming target of between 1.5C to 2C and pledging action to cut carbon emissions.



But they say the actions agreed are far too weak to get anywhere close to that target. Of even greater concern, they say, is the lack of dramatic immediate action that was agreed to tackle global warming. The Paris Agreement only comes into force in 2020 - by which point huge amounts of additional CO2 will have been pumped into the atmosphere. The signatories claim this makes it all but impossible to limit global warming to 2C, let alone 1.5C.



A civil defence member carries a dead child in a site hit by what activists said were airstrikes carried out by the Russian air force in the rebel-controlled area of Maaret al-Numan town in Idlib province, Syria January, yesterday. At least 70 people died in what activists said where four vacuum bombs dropped by the Russian air force in the town of Maaret al-Numan.

# NEWS IN brief

## 2 more Palestinian attackers shot dead

AFP, Nabhus

Two Palestinians tried to stab Israeli soldiers manning a checkpoint in the occupied West Bank yesterday before being shot dead, the army said. The attack occurred in the north of the Jordan Valley, according to a spokeswoman. Twenty-two Israelis and 146 Palestinians have been killed in recent bout of violence since October 1.

## French mosques open doors to the public

AFP, Paris

Hundreds of French mosques are participating in a major open-house event this weekend, offering visitors the opportunity to come in for tea and a chat about Islam in a country shaken by jihadist attacks. Organised by the country's leading Muslim body, the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), it aims to stimulate dialogue about Islam and create a greater sense of "national cohesion."

## Egypt court upholds Mubarak jail term

REUTERS, Cairo

Egypt's court of appeals yesterday rejected an appeal by former President Hosni Mubarak and his two sons over a three-year jail sentence for corruption. An Egyptian court sentenced Mubarak and his sons to three years in jail without parole on May 9 in a retrial, although the trio is unlikely to go to jail again as they had already served their sentences.

## Blast in Meghalaya kills 2

TNN, Shillong

At least two people were killed yesterday in a blast at William Nagar market in East Garo Hills in Meghalaya, India, Times Now reported. The militant group Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) is suspected to be behind the blast. More than 10 smaller militant outfits are said to be operating in the Garo Hills region. Last year, police had shot dead about 40 militants.

## Twin sister of Iran's last shah dies at 96

AFP, New York

Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, the twin sister of the last shah of Iran and a controversial trailblazer for women's rights, has died aged 96 at her home in Europe on Thursday. Princess Ashraf, who played a key role in domestic and international politics, was widely regarded as a talented diplomat and headed the Iranian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly for more than a decade.

# Experts fear 'European 9/11' in 2016

AFP, Paris

Just a week into the year, France has already been rattled by an attempted attack on a police station, but counter-terrorism officials have far graver fears for Europe in 2016.

November's attacks in Paris, in which 130 people were killed by Islamic State group jihadists, showed the trauma that could be caused by a group of men with Kalashnikov rifles, but experts fear it could be just the start.

"Unfortunately, I think 2015 was nothing," a counter-terrorism official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We are moving towards a European 9/11: simultaneous attacks on the same day in several countries, several places. A very coordinated thing. We know the terrorists are working on this," he added.

He said the Islamic State group was recruiting and training Europeans "with the goal of sending them back to hit their countries of origin".

"They have the necessary false documents, the mastery of the language, the sites, the weapons. We stop a lot of them, but it must be recognised that we are overwhelmed. Some will get through -- some already have."

Faced with an enemy that is happy to die and maximise civilian casualties, the challenge for France's security forces is to massively speed up response times.

Police, military and intelligence services are constantly adapting to the shape-shifting threat, but so are the other side and often more quickly and effectively, specialists said.

# MIGRANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN MASS SEXUAL ASSAULTS

# Merkel begins U-turn on immigration policy

AFP, Cologne

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday backed a toughening of expulsion rules for convicted refugees, as protesters took to the streets against a shocking rash of sexual assaults blamed on migrants during New Year's festivities.

Both women's groups and supporters of the xenophobic PEGIDA movement mobilised in separate rallies in Cologne, as Merkel declared that refugees found to have committed a crime -- even those who have not been given jail terms -- should be required to leave Germany.

"If the law does not suffice, then the law must be changed" she said, vowing action to protect not just German citizens, but innocent refugees too.

Outrage is growing in Germany over the revelations that hundreds of women ran a gauntlet of groping hands, lewd insults and

robberies in mob violence last week in the western city on the New Year eve.

Most of the assailants were of Arabic or North African background, according to eye-witnesses, police and media reports.

The majority of suspects identified by federal police are also migrants, adding fuel to criticism of Merkel's liberal migrant policy -- which brought 1.1 million new asylum seekers to Germany last year.

Banging pots and blowing whistles, demonstrators waved signs in German meaning "No violence against women" and "No means no! It's the law!" while others read: "Protect our women and children."

The mob violence has played into popular fears, and threatened to cloud what had been a broadly welcoming mood in Germany where crowds cheered as Syrian refugees arrived by train in September.



# INDIAN AIR BASE TERROR ATTACK

# US wants Pakistan to act fast against attack perpetrators

## Pak PM, army & ISI chief condemn attack as Modi visits base

PTI, Washington

The US feels that time has come for Pakistan to walk the talk on the promises it made -- both in public and in private conversations -- that there would be no discrimination in its action against terrorist networks and bring the perpetrators of the Pathankot attack to justice.

Amid Indian intelligence reports that groups and people within Pakistan planned and executed the strike on the Pathankot airbase, a senior state department official said Pakistan should not come out with lame excuses to shield them as has been the case with the Mumbai terrorist attack.

"They (Pakistan) have said publicly that they are going to investigate. They have said publicly that they are not going to discriminate between terrorist groups. We look to

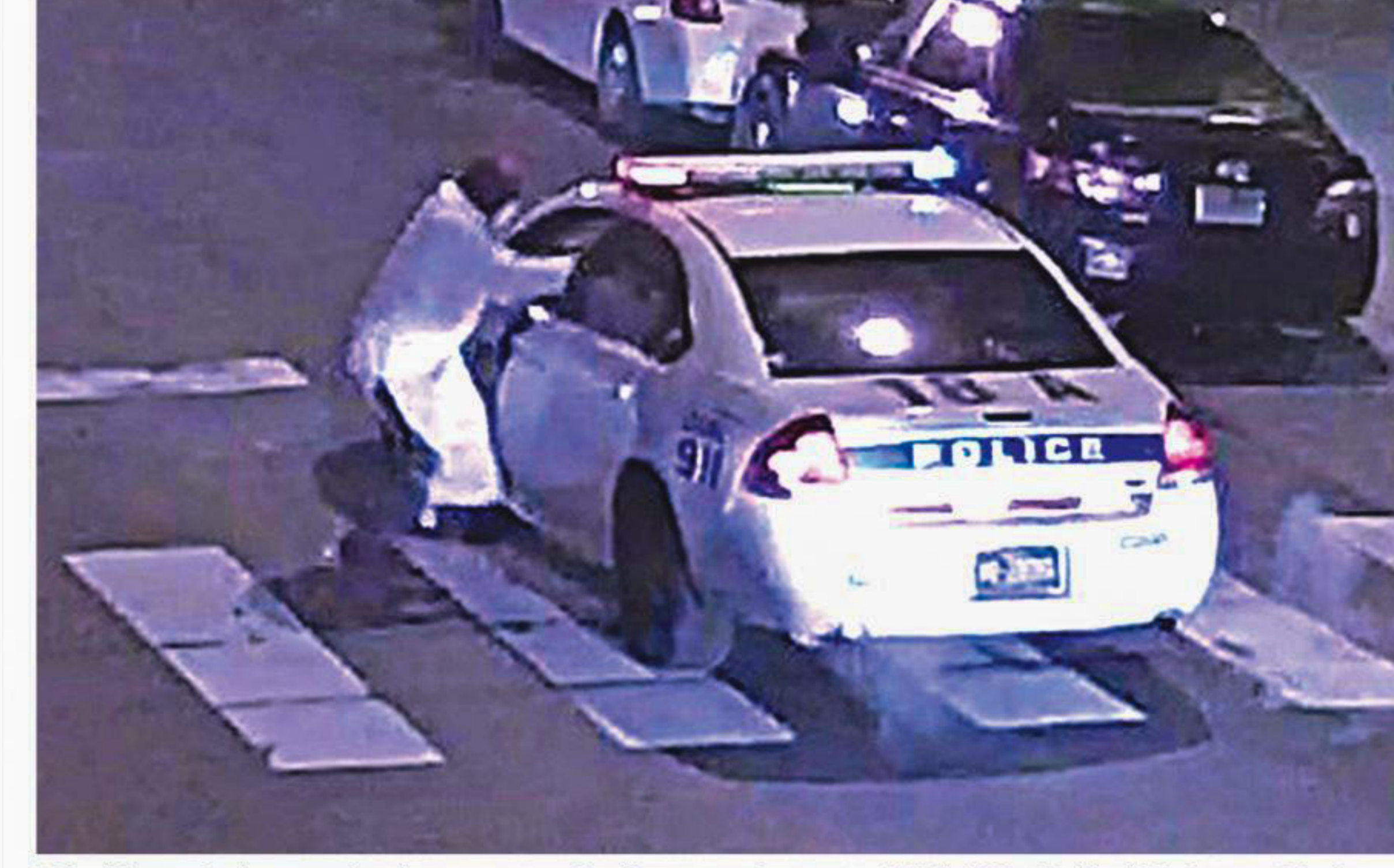
see actions to back up those words," the official added.

The official indicated that the US wants to give the civilian government time and space to act on its words.

The comment came after Pakistan's civilian and military leadership, in an unprecedented manner, on Friday promised full cooperation with New Delhi in eradicating the menace of terrorism from the region.

Narendra Modi yesterday praised the country's security forces on a visit to Pathankot air force base, one week after a militant attack left seven soldiers dead.

The premier flew to the base in northern Punjab state to conduct an aerial survey of the area near the Pakistan border, following the strike by gunmen whom officials suspect belonged to the banned Pakistan-based group Jaish-e-Mohammed.



This video grab shows a shooting suspect and police car on January 7, 2016 in Philadelphia, USA. A man claiming allegiance to the Islamic State extremist group shot and seriously wounded a police officer in Philadelphia, opening fire multiple times at point-blank range with a stolen police gun before he was arrested, officials said Friday.

PHOTO: AFP