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Talal bin Abdulaziz, Reformist Saudi Prince, Is Dead at 87

By The Associated Press

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Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz, a senior member of the Saudi royal family who supported women's rights and once led a group of dissident princes, died on Saturday. He was 87.

His death was announced by his son Prince Abdulaziz bin Talal on Twitter, and confirmed in a statement on Prince Talal's website. Neither statement specified where he died or what the cause was.

Prince Talal was an older brother of King Salman and the father of the billionaire businessman and investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal. His father, King Abdulaziz, was the founder and first ruler of modern Saudi Arabia. His sons have ruled since his death in 1953, with the throne passing from brother to brother.

Prince Talal served as minister of communications in the 1950s and minister of finance in the early '60s. A tribute on his website credited him with opening the first private hospital in Riyadh in the 1950s and providing funds for free medical care there. In 1957, a time when girls had no access to formal education in Riyadh and schools were open only to boys, he founded the first school for girls there.



Prince Talal greeting Queen Rania of Jordan during opening ceremonies at the Jordan branch of the Arab Open University in Amman in 2010. Nader Daoud/Associated Press

Soon after he was appointed finance minister, he led a group of princes, known as the Free Princes Movement, which called for a constitutional monarchy that distributed some of the king's powers. The group advocated the creation of a constitution to govern the kingdom, rather than rules based solely on clerical interpretation of the Quran and other religious doctrines.

Prince Talal led the group from Beirut and from Cairo, which under President Gamal Abdel Nasser was an adversary of Riyadh. The prince's assets were seized, but he was not stripped of his nationality, a punishment Gulf monarchies have employed against dissidents.

After rifts emerged between Prince Talal and Egypt, he was allowed to return to Saudi Arabia in 1964 under King Faisal, who had deposed his brother King Saud that same year.

Prince Talal served until 2011 as a member of the Allegiance Council, a body of senior princes designated to meet and choose the next king from among themselves. He had reportedly left the council after questioning its efficacy when a senior prince was appointed to the line of succession without the council being fully consulted.

Complete information on survivors was not immediately available.

The New York Times contributed reporting.