

Saudis Appoint First-Ever Female Ambassador as Envoy to the United States

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Key Points

- Saudi King Salman issued a Royal Decree on February 23 appointing ambassador to the United States Prince Khalid bin Salman as Deputy Defense Minister and Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan as Prince Khalid's successor in Washington. She will be the first-ever female Saudi Ambassador and the highest-profile female official in the Kingdom.
- These moves come as the Kingdom continues to grapple with the fallout from the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, as well as concerns in the U.S. and elsewhere about the Saudi-led war in Yemen and the arrest and continuing detention of high-profile female activists and others in the Kingdom.
- By appointing Princess Reema as ambassador to the U.S., the Saudis likely hope to refocus the public discourse, at least in part, on the steps the Kingdom has taken in recent years such as to allow women to drive, to restrict the authority of the religious police, and to permit and promote previously-banned cinemas, musical and other performances, and mixed-gender events.
- Princess Reema appears well-suited to the challenge. She is very familiar with the U.S., having grown up in Washington when her father Prince Bandar bin Sultan was ambassador from 1983-2005, and is thoughtful and articulate. Last year, she visited Washington and spoke at think tanks and elsewhere about the Kingdom's steps to empower women.
- Before this appointment, Princess Reema led Development and Planning for the Kingdom's General Sports Authority, where she advanced efforts to enable women to participate in sports among other initiatives. She previously co-founded Yibreen, a women's day gym, and led luxury retailer Harvey Nichols' operations in Riyadh.
- In addition to her political priorities, we expect Princess Reema will be a strong advocate for U.S. business in the Kingdom. She is expected to take up her new role in Washington soon.

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