



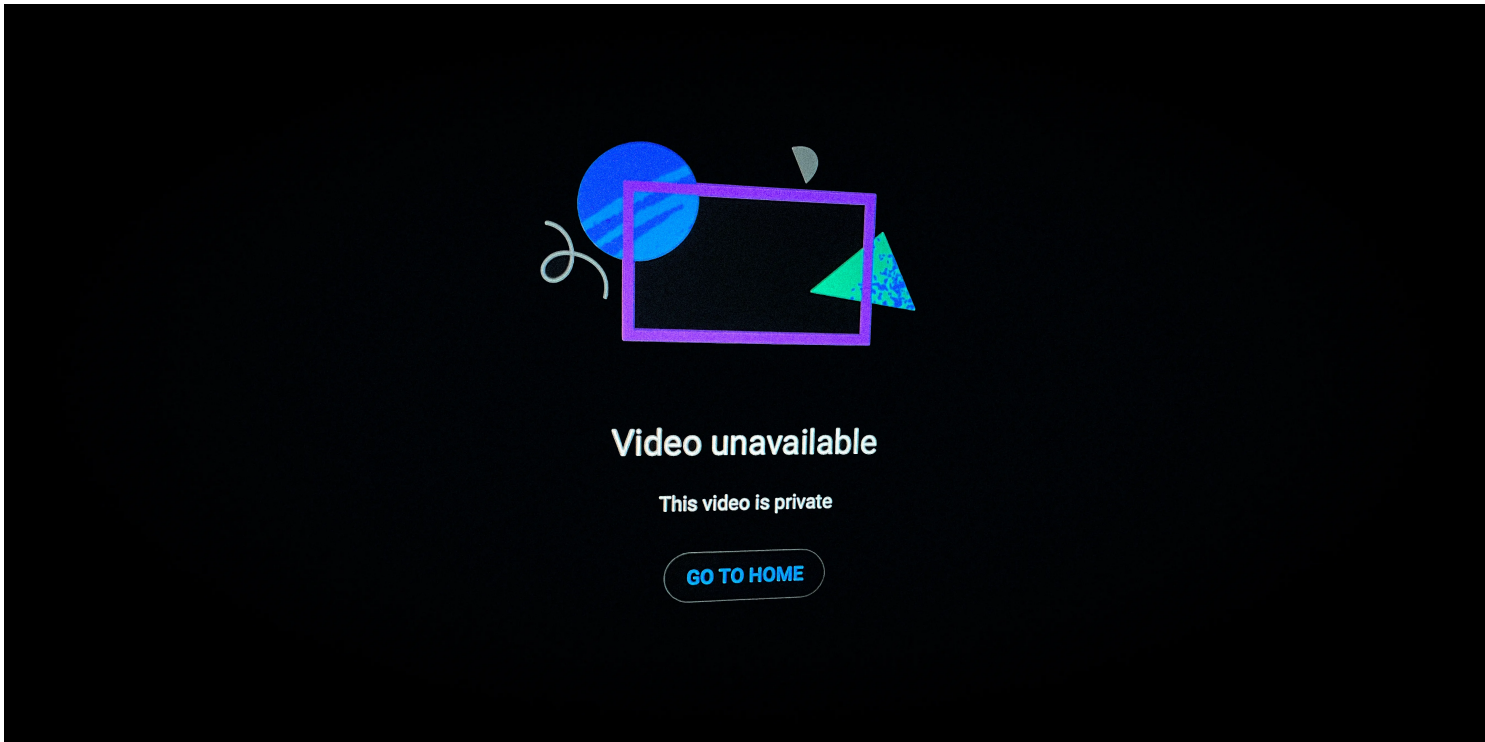
VICE PULLED A DOCUMENTARY CRITICAL OF SAUDI ARABIA. BUT HERE IT IS.

Vice’s hard-nosed coverage on Saudi Arabia changed after investment deals with the repressive kingdom. A deleted documentary is not completely gone, however.

Nikita Mazurov

September 9 2023, 7:00 a.m.

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Vice’s “Inside Saudi Crown Prince’s Ruthless Quest for Power” was uploaded to the Vice News YouTube channel on June 19, 2023, but the link now shows a message that says “video unavailable.” Photo: The Intercept

IN THE PAST, Vice has documented the [history of censorship](#) on YouTube. More recently, since the company's near implosion, it became an active participant in making things disappear.

In June, six months after announcing a partnership deal with a Saudi Arabian government-owned media company, Vice uploaded but then quickly removed a documentary critical of the Persian Gulf monarchy's notorious dictator, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, or MBS.

The nearly nine-minute film, titled "Inside Saudi Crown Prince's Ruthless Quest for Power," was uploaded to the Vice News YouTube channel on June 19, 2023. It garnered more than three-quarters of a million views before being set to "private" within four days of being posted. It can no longer be seen at its [original link](#) on Vice's YouTube channel; visitors see a message that says "video unavailable." Vice did not respond to a request for comment on why the video was published and then made private or if there are any plans to make the video public again.

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The Guardian first [reported](#) that a "film in the Vice world news Investigators series about Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman was deleted from the internet after being uploaded." Though Vice did remove the film from its public YouTube channel, it is, in fact, not

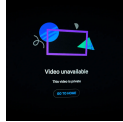
“deleted from the internet” and [presently remains publicly accessible](#) via web archival services.

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Vice’s description of the video, now also unavailable on YouTube, [previously stated](#) that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed “orchestrates The Ritz Purge, kidnaps Saudi’s elites and royal relatives with allegations of torture inside, and his own men linked to the brutal hacking of Journalist Khashoggi – a murder that stunned the world.” The description goes on to state that Wall Street Journal reporters Bradley Hope and Justin Scheck “attempt to unfold the motivations of the prince’s most reckless decision-making.” Hope and Scheck are the co-authors of the 2020 book “Blood and Oil: Mohammed bin Salman’s Ruthless Quest for Global Power.”



A screenshot from the documentary “Inside Saudi Crown Prince’s Ruthless Quest for Power,” which Vice News deleted from its YouTube channel. Image: The Intercept; Source: Vice News

In the documentary, Hope states that Crown Prince Mohammed is “disgraced internationally” owing to the Jamal Khashoggi murder, a [topic](#) which Vice critically covered at length in the past. More recently, however, Vice has shifted its coverage of Saudi Arabia, apparently due to the growth of its commercial relationship with the kingdom. The relationship appears to have begun in [2017](#), owing to MBS’s younger brother, Khalid bin Salman, being infatuated with the brand; bin Salman reportedly set up a meeting between Vice co-founder Shane Smith and MBS.

By the end of 2018, Vice had worked with the Saudi Research and Media Group to produce [promotional videos for Saudi Arabia](#). A few days after the Guardian piece detailing the deal came out, an “industry source” told [Variety](#) (whose parent company, Penske Media Corporation, received [\\$200 million](#) from the Saudi sovereign wealth fund earlier that year) that Vice was “reviewing” its contract with SRMG.

A subsequent Guardian [investigation](#) revealed that in 2020, Vice helped organize a Saudi music festival subsidized by the Saudi government. Vice's name was not listed on publicity materials for the event, and contractors working on the event were presented with nondisclosure agreements.

In 2021, Vice opened an office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The media company has gone from being "[banned from filming in Riyadh](#)" in 2018 to now [actively recruiting](#) for a producer "responsible for developing and assisting the producing of video content from short form content to long-form for our new media brand, headquartered in Riyadh." The company lists 11 [other Riyadh-based openings](#).

Commenting on the opening of the Riyadh office, a Vice spokesperson [told](#) the Guardian that "our editorial voice has and always will report with complete autonomy and independence." In response to the Guardian [recently asking](#) about the rationale for the removal of the film, a Vice source stated that this was partially owing to concerns about the safety of Saudi-based staff.

In September 2022, the New York Times [reported](#) that Vice was considering engaging in a deal with the Saudi media company MBC. The deal was officially [announced](#) at the start of 2023. Most recently, the Guardian reported that Vice shelved a story which stated that the "Saudi state is helping families to harass and threaten transgender Saudis based overseas." In response to this latest instance of apparent capitulation to advancing Saudi interests, the Vice Union issued a [statement](#) saying that it was "horrified but not shocked." It added, "We know the company is financially bankrupt, but it shouldn't be morally bankrupt too."

Meanwhile, a map of Saudi Arabia reportedly [hangs](#) on a wall in Vice's London office.

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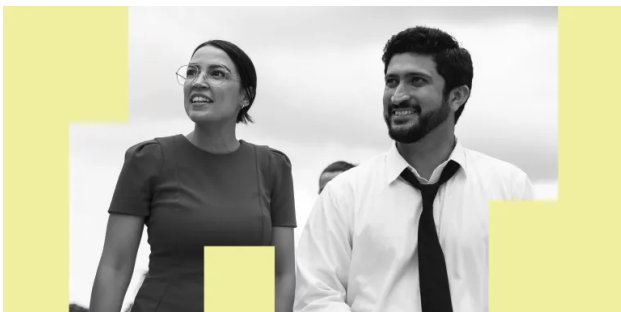
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