

Divisions within Saudi Establishment: Prince Bandar allegedly Advocating Military Response against Iran

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The escalating tension between Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the current Saudi National Security Advisor and former Saudi Ambassador to the United States, and Prince Turki al-Faisal, who only this week resigned his position as Saudi Ambassador in Washington, is taking some new and disturbing turns.

An [Associated Press story written by Cairo-based correspondent Salah Nasrawi](#) cites a Saudi official as saying that:

“Many in the royal family concluded that if he stayed longer, things might even get worse.”

While the AP story cites only one official with “close working ties with the Saudi Foreign Ministry,” the comment sounds seriously at odds with the reports that I have been receiving from dozens of Saudi commentators within and around the Saudi royal family and foreign ministry.

What is clear from reports is that while King Abdullah did not stop an escalation in tensions between Bandar and Turki, no one pushed Turki to leave or resign. In fact, the King expected Prince Turki to find his own way of dealing with Bandar and his staff — not to resign. If anything, Turki’s resignation forces the King to find a way to reconnect Turki and his clan of brothers back to the regent and will probably cause damage to Bandar’s loftier ambitions.

Four current Saudi Foreign Ministry officials and one royal family member have shared with me that the “likely source” for Nasrawi’s article and the negative commentary about Prince Turki is allegedly Rihab Massoud, a close aide of Prince Bandar who served as Charge d’Affaires in the Saudi Embassy in Washington during Bandar’s tenure and frequent absences and who — while formally a Foreign Ministry official — is now on leave to serve as Bandar’s “No. 2” in his National Security Advisor office.

Massoud is considered by many to be the person who has played the most active role animating and driving the escalating war between Prince Turki and Prince Bandar. One person called Massoud Bandar’s “Rasputin”. Another called Massoud a “flamboyant, mean-spirited vassal of Bandar” who has tried to maintain power and status through obsequiousness to Cheney and his team.

Sources also confirm that Ambassador Turki’s decision to resign not only had to do with his

refusal to tolerate the unprofessionalism of Bandar and Massoud — but with the signals that Bandar and Massoud have sent to Cheney, David Addington and others on Cheney’s national security staff that Saudi Arabia would “acquiesce to, accept, and not interfere with” American military action against Iran.

While reports of how far Bandar has gone in supporting Cheney’s desire for military action vary, insiders report that Bandar has “essentially assured” the Vice President that Saudi Arabia could be moved to accept and possibly support American military action against Iran. Another source has reported to me that Bandar himself strongly supports Cheney’s views of a military response to Iran.

This is the core of the deep divide between Prince Turki and Bandar — which is also a divide between Foreign Minister Saud and Bandar as well.

The tension is about Iran and how to contain Iran. While Bandar and Rihab Massoud allegedly have affirmed Cheney’s views and are perceived to be Bush administration sycophants, Turki was charting a more realist course for Saudi interests and advising the White House to develop more serious, constructive strategies toward the region that would produce stability and not lead to “a terrorist super-highway stretching from Iran through Iraq and rushing through Syria and Jordan to the edge of Israel.”

(Emphasis Added)

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