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Global Terrorism and Saudi Arabia: Bandar's Terror Network

By Prof. James Petras

Global Research,

Saudi Arabia has all the vices and none of the virtues of an oil rich state like Venezuela. The country is governed by a family dictatorship which tolerates no opposition and severely punishes human rights advocates and political dissidents. Hundreds of billions in oil revenues are controlled by the royal despotism and fuel speculative investments the world over. The ruling elite relies on the purchase of Western arms and US military bases for protection. The wealth of productive nations is syphoned to enrich the conspicuous consumption of the Saudi ruling family. The ruling elite finances the most fanatical, retrograde, misogynist version of Islam, "Wahhabi" a sect of Sunni Islam.

Faced with internal dissent from repressed subjects and religious minorities, the Saudi dictatorship perceives threats and dangers from all sides: overseas, secular, nationalists and Shia ruling governments; internally, moderate Sunni nationalists, democrats and feminists; within the royalist cliques, traditionalists and modernizers. In response it has turned toward financing, training and arming an international network of Islamic terrorists who are directed toward attacking, invading and destroying regimes opposed to the Saudi clerical-dictatorial regime.

The mastermind of the Saudi terror network is Bandar bin Sultan, who has longstanding and deep ties to high level US political, military and intelligence officials. Bandar was trained and indoctrinated at Maxwell Air Force Base and Johns Hopkins University and served as Saudi

Ambassador to the US for over two decades (1983 – 2005). Between 2005 – 2011 he was Secretary of the National Security Council and in 2012 he was appointed as Director General of the Saudi Intelligence Agency. Early on Bandar became deeply immersed in clandestine terror operations working in liaison with the CIA. Among his numerous “dirty operations” with the CIA during the 1980s, Bandar channeled \$32 million dollars to the Nicaragua Contra’s engaged in a terror campaign to overthrow the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua. During his tenure as ambassador he was actively engaged in protecting Saudi royalty with ties to the 9/11/01 bombing of the Triple Towers and the Pentagon. Suspicion that Bandar and his allies in the Royal family had prior knowledge of the bombings by Saudi terrorists (11 of the 19), is suggested by the sudden flight of Saudi Royalty following the terrorist act. US intelligence documents regarding the Saudi-Bandar connection are under Congressional review.

With a wealth of experience and training in running clandestine terrorist operations, derived from his two decades of collaboration with the US intelligence agencies, Bandar was in a position to organize his own global terror network in defense of the isolated retrograde and vulnerable Saudi despotic monarchy.

Bandar’s Terror Network

Bandar bin Sultan has transformed Saudi Arabia from an inward-looking, tribal based regime totally dependent on US military power for its survival, to a major regional center of a vast terror network, an active financial backer of rightwing military dictatorships (Egypt) and client regimes (Yemen) and military interventor in the Gulf region (Bahrain). Bandar has financed and armed a vast array of clandestine terror operations, utilizing Islamic affiliates of Al Qaeda, the Saudi controlled Wahhabi sect as well as numerous other Sunni armed groups. Bandar is a “pragmatic” terrorist operator: repressing Al Qaeda adversaries in Saudi Arabia and financing Al Qaeda terrorists in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere., While Bandar was a long-term asset of the US intelligence services, he has, more recently, taken an ‘independent course’ where the regional interests of the despotic state diverge from those of the US. In the same vein, while Saudi Arabia has a longstanding enmity toward Israel, Bandar has developed a “covert understanding” and working relation with the Netanyahu regime, around their common enmity toward Iran and more specifically in opposition to the interim agreement between the Obama-Rohani regime.

Bandar has intervened directly or via proxies in reshaping political alignments, destabilizing adversaries and bolstering and expanding the political reach of the Saudi dictatorship from North Africa to South Asia, from the Russian Caucasus to the Horn of Africa, sometimes in concert with Western imperialism, other times projecting Saudi hegemonic aspirations.

North Africa: Tunisia, Morocco, Libya and Egypt

Bandar has poured billions of dollars to bolster the rightwing pro-Islamic regimes in Tunisia and Morocco, ensuring that the mass pro-democracy movements would be repressed, marginalized and demobilized.. Islamic extremists receiving Saudi financial support are encouraged to back the “moderate” Islamists in government by assassinating secular democratic

leaders and socialist trade union leaders in opposition. Bandar's policies largely coincide with those of the US and France in Tunisia and Morocco; but not in Libya and Egypt.

Saudi financial backing for Islamist terrorists and Al Qaeda affiliates against Libyan President Gadhafi were in-line with the NATO air war. However divergences emerged in the aftermath: the NATO backed client regime made up of neo-liberal ex-pat's faced off against Saudi backed Al Qaeda and Islamist terror gangs and assorted tribal gunmen and marauders. Bandar funded Islamic extremists in Libya were bankrolled to extend their military operations to Syria, where the Saudi regime was organizing a vast military operation to overthrow the Assad regime. The internecine conflict between NATO and Saudi armed groups in Libya, spilled over and led to the Islamist murder of the US Ambassador and CIA operatives in Benghazi. Having overthrown Gadhafi, Bandar virtually abandoned interest in the ensuing blood bath and chaos provoked by his armed assets. They in turn, became self-financing – robbing banks, pilfering oil and emptying local treasuries – relatively “independent” of Bandar's control.

In Egypt, Bandar developed, in coordination with Israel (but for different reasons), a strategy of undermining the relatively independent, democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood regime of Mohammed Morsi. Bandar and the Saudi dictatorship financially backed the military coup and dictatorship of General Sisi. The US strategy of a power-sharing agreement between the Moslem Brotherhood and the military regime, combining popular electoral legitimacy and the pro-Israel-pro NATO military was sabotaged. With a \$15 billion aid package and promises of more to come, Bandar provided the Egyptian military a financial lifeline and economic immunity from any international financial reprisals. None were taken of any consequences. The military crushed the Brotherhood, jailed and threatened to execute its elected leaders. It outlawed sectors of the liberal-left opposition which it had used as cannon fodder to justify its seizure of power. In backing the military coup, Bandar eliminated a rival, democratically elected Islamic regime which stood in contrast to the Saudi despotism. He secured a like-minded dictatorial regime in a key Arab country, even though the military rulers are more secular, pro-Western, pro-Israel and less anti-Assad than the Brotherhood regime. Bandar's success in greasing the wheels for the Egyptian coup secured a political ally but faces an uncertain future.

The revival of a new anti-dictatorial mass movement would also target the Saudi connection. Moreover Bandar undercut and weakened Gulf State unity: Qatar had financed the Morsi regime and was out \$5 billion dollars it had extended to the previous regime.

Bandar's terror network is most evident in his long-term large scale financing, arming, training and transport of tens of thousands of Islamic terrorist “volunteers” from the US, Europe, the Middle East, the Caucuses, North Africa and elsewhere.. Al Qaeda terrorists in Saudi Arabia became “martyrs of Islam” in Syria. Dozens of Islamic armed gangs in Syria competed for Saudi arms and funds. Training bases with US and European instructors and Saudi financing were established in Jordan, Pakistan and Turkey. Bandar financed the major ‘rebel’ Islamic terrorist armed group, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, for cross border operations.

With Hezbollah supporting Assad, Bandar directed money and arms to the Abdullah Azzam Brigades in Lebanon to bomb South Beirut, the Iranian embassy and Tripoli. Bandar directed \$3

billion to the Lebanese military with the idea of fomenting a new civil war between it and Hezbollah. In co-ordination with France and the US, but with far greater funding and greater latitude to recruit Islamic terrorist, Bandar assumed the leading role and became the principle director of a three front military and diplomatic offensive against Syria, Hezbollah and Iran. For Bandar, an Islamic takeover in Syria would lead to an Islamic Syrian invasion in support of Al Qaeda in Lebanon to defeat Hezbollah in hopes of isolating Iran. Teheran would then become the target of a Saudi-Israeli-US offensive. Bandar's strategy is more fantasy than reality.

Bandar Diverges from Washington: the Offensive in Iraq and Iran

Saudi Arabia has been an extremely useful but sometimes out of control client of Washington. This is especially the case since Bandar has taken over as Intelligence chief: a long-time asset of the CIA he has also, at times, taken the liberty to extract "favors" for his services, especially when those "favors" enhance his upward advance within the Saudi power structure. Hence, for example, his ability to secure AWACs despite AIPAC opposition earned him merit points. As did Bandar's ability to secure the departure of several hundred Saudi 'royalty' with ties to the 9/11 bombers, despite a high level national security lockdown in the aftermath of the bombing.

While there were episodic transgressions in the past, Bandar moved on to more serious divergences from US policy. He went ahead, building his own terror network, directed toward maximizing Saudi hegemony – even where it conflicted with US proxies, clients and clandestine operatives.

While the US is committed to backing the rightwing Malicki regime in Iraq, Bandar is providing political, military and financial backing to the Sunni terrorist "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria". When the US negotiated the "interim agreement" with Iran Bandar voiced his opposition and "bought" support. Saudi signed off on a billion dollar arms agreement during French President Hollande's visit, in exchange for greater sanctions on Iran. Bandar also expressed support for Israel's use of the Zionist power configuration to influence the Congress, to sabotage US negotiations with Iran.

Bandar has moved beyond his original submission to US intelligence handlers. His close ties with past and present US and EU presidents and political influentials have encouraged him to engage in "Big Power adventures". He met with Russian President Putin to convince him to drop his support for Syria, offering a carrot or a stick: a multi-billion dollar arms sale for compliance and a threat to unleash Chechnyan terrorists to undermine the Sochi Olympics. He has turned Erdogan from a NATO ally supporting 'moderate' armed opponents to Bashar Assad, into embracing the Saudi backed 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria', a terrorist Al Qaeda affiliate. Bandar has "overlooked" Erdogan's "opportunist" efforts to sign off oil deals with Iran and Iraq, his continuing military arrangements with NATO and his past backing of the defunct Morsi regime in Egypt, in order to secure Erdogan's support for the easy transit of large numbers of Saudi trained terrorists to Syria and probably Lebanon.

Bandar has strengthened ties with the armed Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, arming and financing their armed resistance against the US, as well as offering the US a site for a ‘negotiated departure’.

Bandar is probably supporting and arming Uighur Muslim terrorists in western China, and Chechens and Caucasian Islamic terrorists in Russia, even as the Saudi’s expand their oil agreements with China and cooperate with Russia’s Gazprom.

The only region where the Saudi’s have exercised direct military intervention is in the Gulf min-state of Bahrain, where Saudi troops crushed the pro-democracy movement challenging the local despot.

Bandar: Global Terror on Dubious Domestic Foundations

Bandar has embarked on an extraordinary transformation of Saudi foreign policy and enhanced its global influence. All to the worst. Like Israel, when a reactionary ruler comes to power and overturns the democratic order, Saudi arrives on the scene with bags of dollars to buttress the regime. Whenever an Islamic terror network emerges to subvert a nationalist, secular or Shia regime, it can count on Saudi funds and arms. What some Western scribes euphemistically describe as “tenuous effort to liberalize and modernize” the retrograde Saudi regime, is really a military upgrade of its overseas terrorist activity. Bandar uses modern techniques of terror to impose the Saudi model of reactionary rule on neighboring and distant regimes with Muslim populations.

The problem is that Bandar’s “adventurous” large scale overseas operations conflict with some of the ruling Royal family’s “introspective” style of rulership. They want to be left alone to accrue hundreds of billions collecting petrol rents, to invest in high-end properties around the world, and to quietly patronize high end call girls in Washington, London and Beirut –while posing as pious guardians of Medina, Mecca and the Holy sites. So far Bandar has not been challenged, because he has been careful to pay his respects to the ruling monarch and his inner circle. He has bought and brought Western and Eastern prime ministers, presidents and other respectable notable to Riyadh to sign deals and pay compliments to the delight of the reigning despot. Yet his solicitous behavior to overseas Al Qaeda operations, his encouraging Saudi extremists to go overseas and engage in terrorist wars, disturbs monarchical circles. They worry that Saudis trained, armed and knowledgeable terrorists – dubbed as “holy warriors” – may return from Syria, Russia and Iraq and bomb the Kings palaces. Moreover, oversea regimes targeted by Bandar’s terror network may retaliate: Russia or Iran, Syrians, Egyptians, Pakistanis, Iraqis may just sponsor their own instruments of retaliation. Despite the hundreds of billions spent on arms purchases, the Saudi regime is very vulnerable on all levels. Apart from tribal legions, the billionaire elite have little popular support and even less legitimacy. It depends on overseas migrant labor, foreign “experts” and US military forces. The Saudi elite is also despised by the most religious of the Wahhabi clergy for allowing “infidels” on sacred terrain. While Bandar extends Saudi power abroad, the domestic foundations of rule are narrowing. While he defies US policymakers in Syria, Iran and Afghanistan, the regime depends on the US Air Force and Seventh Fleet to protect it from a growing array of adversarial regimes.

Bandar, with his inflated ego, may believe that he is a “Saladin” building a new Islamic empire, but in reality, by waving one finger his patron monarch can lead to his rapid dismissal. One too many provocative civilian bombings by his Islamic terrorist beneficiaries can lead to an international crises leading to Saudi Arabia becoming the target of world opprobrium.

In reality, Bandar bin Sultan is the protégé and successor of Bin Laden; he has deepened and systematized global terrorism. Bandar’s terror network has murdered far more innocent victims than Bin Laden. That, of course, is to be expected; after all he has billions of dollars from the Saudi treasury, training from the CIA and the handshake of Netanyahu!