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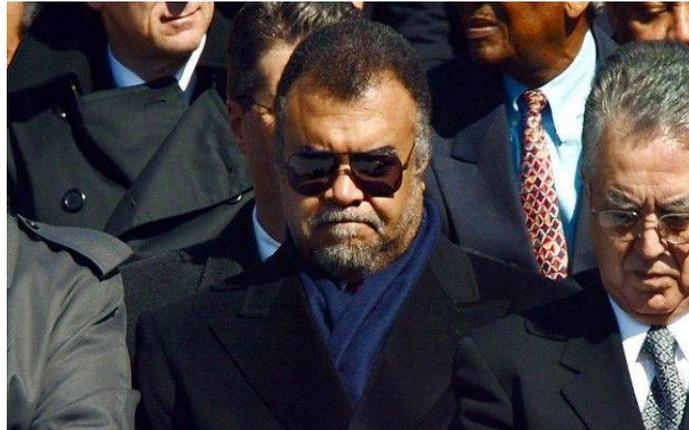
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Saudi king replaces spymaster Bandar bin Sultan

4/15/2014



Saudi Prince Bandar Bin Sultan

Saudi Arabia's king has replaced spy chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who spearheaded the kingdom's mission in the Syria crisis, with Youssef al-Idrisi.

The official SPA news agency cited a royal decree on Tuesday as saying that Bandar was "exempted... from his position at his own request" and replaced by his deputy al-Idrisi.

The 65-year-old prince, a former ambassador to the United States, was a staunch supporter of Takfiri militants operating against the Syrian government. He was appointed spy chief in 2012.

Bandar's replacement came after recent reports said that he was returning to Saudi Arabia after around two months abroad for surgery on his shoulder.

Diplomats said that during his absence, Saudi Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef led the intelligence agency and Riyadh's anti-Damascus policies.

In February, Prince Mohammed represented Saudi Arabia at a conclave of Western and Arab spymasters in Washington, where he held talks with US National Security Adviser Susan Rice over the policies in Syria. The move confirmed that Bandar had been pushed aside.

According to diplomatic sources, Washington had demanded the removal of Prince Bandar from the Syrian file because of his mismanagement of the situation in the country, which has been grappling with a foreign-backed crisis since March 2011.

Bandar is widely believed to be the key figure trying to increase Saudi weapons flow to the foreign-backed militants in Syria.

The Saudi prince is also known to have had close ties with former US President George W. Bush, and was an advocate of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.