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## Prince Bandar back in the Driver's Seat in Riyadh

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Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulazia bin Saud is the godfather behind the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), now called the «Islamic State» or «Islamic Caliphate». Without Saudi support for the most radical of the Islamist opposition forces battling Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, it is doubtful that ISIL would have ever incubated beyond a fringe group in Syria.

Although Bandar has been counted out of Saudi politics before, it now appears that hopes for the sacking of the former long-serving Saudi ambassador to the United States and personal friend of the Bush political family, were mere «wishful thinking» on the part of those who have crossed swords in the past with Bandar.

Bandar has returned to an influential position advising King Abdullah after being sacked as

Saudi intelligence chief last April. Bandar's new title is «adviser to the King and his special envoy». Bandar never actually left the Saudi inner circle. After being dismissed as intelligence chief in April, he retained his position as secretary general of the Saudi National Security Council, a position similar to that held by Susan Rice as the White House National Security Adviser and director of the National Security Council.

Bandar's restoration to favor within the House of Saud came as King Abdullah appointed the recently-fired deputy defense minister, Prince Khaled bin Bandar bin Abdul Aziz, as the new chief of Saudi intelligence. Prince Khaled now serves in the same Syrian rebel liaison position that Prince Bandar held when the Saudis arranged for millions of dollars in cash and weapons to be transferred to radical Salafists and takfiris fighting Assad in Syria. Although it does appear that Bandar was involved in some sort of internal schism in the House of Saud, it took a mere two days for Khaled from losing his job as deputy defense minister, a job he held for only 45 days, to being named as Saudi intelligence chief. Although they share the same name, Saudi intelligence chief Khaled bin Bandar should not be confused with Saudi businessman Khaled bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the son of Prince Bandar.

The important position of deputy defense minister remains unfilled. The vacancy has forced Defense Minister Salman bin Abdul Aziz, the Crown Prince, to handle the daily operations of the Defense Ministry. The Saudi governmental shuffle came about to ensure that key Saudi defense and intelligence officials were on the same page in reasserting control over ISIL as it continues to advance toward Baghdad and approaches the Iraqi-Saudi border where some border skirmishes between ISIL guerrillas and Saudi border troops have already been reported.

Unquestionably, the House of Saud has been a major bank roller of ISIL since the beginning of their roles in Syria's civil war. The Al Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), which has been mainly funded by Qatar, has pledged its support for ISIL as its forces spread across northern and western Iraq and extend their reach into northeastern Syria.

The aim of Saudi Arabia has always been to destabilize Iraq and Syria, hoping that the Nouri al-Maliki and Bashar al Assad governments, respectively, will be overthrown and replaced with radical Sunni regimes beholden to the Saudis. Bandar also wants to limit the influence of Qatar, which he believes backs the Muslim Brotherhood, a bitter enemy of the House of Saud. Bandar's return to power signaled a freeze in a developing détente between Saudi Arabia and Qatar's emir, Tamim bin Hamad al Thani.

Bandar was originally forced out as Saudi intelligence chief after President Barack Obama met with King Abdullah in Riyadh on March 28. Bandar's duties as the chief Saudi interlocutor with Syria's rebels was transferred to Saudi Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. Those duties have now been assumed by Prince Khaled.

Prince Mohammed helped steer Saudi support to the U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA), which became a second-tier and weaker player in the Syrian civil war. FSA officials, many of whom are exiled former government officials in the Assad government, are more comfortable in Istanbul hotels and restaurants than on the front lines in Syria. However, after the success of ISIL in eastern Syria and Iraq, the Saudis decided to bring back ISIL's main interlocutor, Prince

Bandar, to bring the group's leadership under firmer Saudi control.

Bandar has maintained strong ties to Jihadist terrorism. Bandar, on a pre-Sochi Olympics trip to Moscow, offered Russia a lucrative weapons deal if Russia ceased its support for Assad. Bandar also told Putin that if Russia rejected Saudi Arabia's offer, Saudi-backed Islamist terrorists in the Caucasus region would be free to launch terrorist attacks on the Winter Olympics in Sochi. Putin reportedly ordered Bandar out of his office in the Kremlin. There are also reports that Saudi-financed Islamist terrorists from Chechnya and Dagestan have been active in Ukraine fighting against Russian-speaking separatists in eastern Ukraine. In some cases, Islamist terrorists have joined Israeli paramilitary units in Ukraine in support of the Kiev government's military actions against eastern Ukraine. In Syria, there have been reports of Mossad coordination with ISIL units in attacks against Syrian government forces, including in the region north of the Golan Heights.

CIA director John O. Brennan, a Saudophile and former CIA station chief in Riyadh, reportedly played a hand in the restoration of Bandar to a key position in the Saudi government. Some 1000 U.S. troops and advisers have been dispatched to Iraq not to prevent the Maliki government from falling but to assist in the transition to a post-Maliki government that will have strong pro-Saudi and Sunni representation. The U.S. military personnel are also in Iraq to protect U.S. assets in the country, including the massive U.S. embassy complex in Baghdad, as well as U.S. oil industry interests.

There were varying unsubstantiated reports at the time of Bandar's dismissal in April that he had been assassinated or wounded while visiting rebel-held positions in Syria. Other reports stated that Bandar, affectionately known by the Bush family as «Bandar Bush» because of his close ties to the American political dynasty, was poisoned in an internal Saudi feud aimed at eliminating the influence of Bandar, the chief of the influential Sudairi clan within the House of Saud. The clan also includes Prince Turki, also a former Saudi intelligence chief, and Crown Prince Salman, the defense minister and heir apparent to the throne after King Abdullah dies.

An ISIL on the move also gives Israel a powerful argument for why it must remain in charge of the West Bank and establish a tighter military control over Gaza. Bandar's goal is to eliminate the current governments of Syria and Iraq, thus depriving Iran of its only two allies in the region... With a radical Sunni caliphate in charge in Baghdad, ISIL will be poised to cross the Iranian border and start a rebellion among Iran's Arab minority in Khuzestan province, the center of Iran's oil industry. With ISIL gaining control of Iraq's southern oil fields as well as part of the fields bordering Iraqi Kurdistan, the takeover by a Saudi proxy of Iran's oil province would give Saudi Arabia effective control over much of the Middle East's oil reserves.

In February, Senator John McCain of Arizona said at the Munich Security Conference, «Thank God for the Saudis and Prince Bandar». McCain echoed similar comments he made earlier on CNN. In 2012, McCain covertly crossed into Syria from Turkey and was photographed with radical Islamists, some of whom are now fighting with ISIL in Iraq. McCain has also been steadfast in his support of Ukrainian fascists and neo-Nazis. In Mr. McCain, «Bandar Bush» has truly met a terrorism supporter comrade-in-arms.