



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 25, 2013

Saudi-U.S. Ties Strained by U.S. Foreign Policy in Middle East

Saudi National Security Council head Prince Bandar bin Sultan (shown) has predicted that Saudi Arabia will make a “major shift” in relations with the United States to protest what Saudis regard as American inaction over Syria’s civil war, among other factors. Bandar, who is very familiar with America, was the Saudi Ambassador to the United States from 1983 until 2005.



A recent [Reuters report](#) cited an unnamed source close to Saudi policy as expressing a similar view. “The shift away from the U.S. is a major one,” Reuters quoted the source saying. “Saudi doesn’t want to find itself any longer in a situation where it is dependent.”

“Prince Bandar told diplomats that he plans to limit interaction with the U.S.,” continued the source. “This happens after the U.S. failed to take any effective action on Syria and Palestine. Relations with the U.S. have been deteriorating for a while, as Saudi feels that the U.S. is growing closer with Iran and the U.S. also failed to support Saudi during the Bahrain uprising.”

Saudi Arabia signaled its unhappiness with U.S. foreign policy last week when it rejected a two-year term on the UN Security Council, presumably to protest the failure of the U.S.-supported UN to end the war in Syria and to settle other Middle East issues. Reuters quoted Prince Turki, a member of the Saudi royal family and former director of Saudi intelligence, whose statement indicated that Saudi Arabia was firm in its decision, which he said was a result of the Security Council’s dual failure to remove Assad from power and to enforce its own resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“There is nothing whimsical about the decision to forego membership of the Security Council. It is based on the ineffectual experience of that body,” Prince Turki said in a speech to the [National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations](#), a non-profit NGO headquartered in Washington.

Prince Bandar described Saudi Arabia’s rejection of the Security Council seat as “a message for the U.S., not the U.N.,” reported the *Wall Street Journal*.

Saudi Arabia, along with Sunni-majority states Turkey and Qatar, have provided support for the rebel coalition in Syria in the form of weapons and even fighters, — volunteers who traveled to Syria on their own in unofficial capacities.

Secretary of State John Kerry met with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal in Paris on October 21, after which he told reporters: “I have great confidence that the United States and Saudi Arabia will continue to be the close and important friends and allies that we have been.”

An October 23 report in the [Washington Post](#) said that Saudi King Abdullah privately expressed his frustration with U.S. policy in a lunch in Riyadh two days earlier with King Abdullah of Jordan and



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Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of the U.A.E., citing “a knowledgeable Arab official.” The Saudi monarch “is convinced the U.S. is unreliable,” this official said. “I don’t see a genuine desire to fix it” on either side, he added.

Post reporter David Ignatius related that in the fall of 2011, Saudi officials in Riyadh told him that that they increasingly regarded the United States as unreliable and would look elsewhere for a partner to bolster their security. Ignatius noted that “Obama’s reaction to these reports was to be peeved that the Saudis didn’t recognize all that the U.S. was doing to help their security, behind the scenes,” but he believes that the problem lies not so much in U.S. actions but in our failure, diplomatically, to reassure the Saudis that we have their best interests in mind.

Ignatius believes that the Obama administration has failed to maintain a relationship of trust with Saudi King Abdullah and suggested that Obama send an emissary to sooth the Saudis’ ruffled feathers. Among his recommendations for the assignment are John Brennan, the CIA director, who was station chief in Riyadh in the late 1990s and former CIA director George Tenet, both of whom enjoyed good relationships with King Abdullah. Tenet, like Ignatius, is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, which has long promoted an interventionist U.S. foreign policy.

Britain’s [Daily Mail](#), which jumped the gun by headlining an October 22 article about the incident “Saudi Arabia severs diplomatic ties with US over response to conflict in Syria,” reported that a senior Saudi prince in Washington criticized President Obama’s Middle East policies, accusing him of “dithering” on Syria and Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The *Daily Mail* quoted a statement from Prince Turki al-Faisal, identified as a member of the Saudi royal family and former director of Saudi intelligence, who called Obama’s policies in Syria “lamentable.”

“The current charade of international control over Bashar’s [Assad’s] chemical arsenal would be funny if it were not so blatantly perfidious. And designed not only to give Mr. Obama an opportunity to back down (from military strikes), but also to help Assad to butcher his people,” said Prince Turki.

The *Daily Mail* also quoted a statement made by Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), the assistant to the Speaker of the House, who told Reuters’ Washington Summit on October 22 that the Saudi actions were intended to pressure Obama to take stronger action in Syria.

“We know their game. They’re trying to send a signal that we should all get involved militarily in Syria, and I think that would be a big mistake to get in the middle of the Syrian civil war,” Van Hollen said.

“And the Saudis should start by stopping their funding of the al Qaeda-related groups in Syria. In addition to the fact that it’s a country that doesn’t allow women to drive,” said Van Hollen.

A statement posted on the Public Affairs page of the [Saudi government’s website](#) on October 21 said:

Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal received U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at his residence in Paris today. During the meeting, they discussed regional issues, focusing particularly on the Syrian crisis, Iran’s nuclear file and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The talks were held to lay the groundwork for a meeting between Secretary Kerry and a delegation of Arab foreign ministers representing the Arab Peace Initiative Committee, which took place afterwards.

Following that meeting, Secretary Kerry and Qatari Foreign Minister Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attyiah held a joint press conference. They stressed their support for the Arab Peace Initiative, which would provide for an immediate peace settlement by way of a two-state solution. They also reviewed the situation in Syria. Secretary Kerry predicted that a Syrian transitional government



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will be formed with the agreement of all parties, adding that the goal of the Geneva 2 Conference is to apply the agreements of the Geneva 1 Conference.

Given the longstanding economic and political relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, it is likely that the current diplomatic crisis will be settled. But as long as the United States continues in its interventionist stance in the region, some nations will object to our involvement, while others — Saudi Arabia in this case — will object because we are not engaged sufficiently to further their interests.

The CEO of The John Birch Society, Arthur R. Thompson, recently commented to *The New American* on the Saudi diplomatic crisis:

If we had minded our own business and not gotten involved in the Middle East to begin with, the Saudis would not have been able to criticize our involvement or lack thereof.

Photo of Prince Bandar bin Sultan: AP Images



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