

# THE DAILY CALLER

## **Saudi spymaster says romance dead between US and Saudi Arabia**

By: Brendan Bordelon – October 23, 2013

The head of Saudi intelligence says his country is in the middle of a “major shift” away from the United States, after disagreements over a changing Middle East severely strained relations between the longtime allies.

Reuters reports that Prince Bandar bin Sultan told a group of European diplomats that Saudi Arabia seeks to fundamentally alter its cozy relationship with the United States due to differences over Syria, Egypt and Iran. “The shift away from the U.S. is a major one,” said a source privy to the conversation. “Saudi doesn’t want to find itself any longer in a situation where it is dependent.”

Washington and Riyadh have enjoyed close relations since the kingdom’s founding in 1932, with the Islamic nation providing a secure oil supply in return for the American military’s protection. But the relationship has never been a natural one, and as the Middle East unravels the two nations’ policies continue to diverge.

“There’s little doubt that as the Obama administration disengages from the Middle East, America’s allies in the region no longer take the US seriously and are taking issues into their own hands,” said Ahmad Majidiyar, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, in an interview with The Daily Caller News Foundation.

The prince’s comments follow the Saudi kingdom’s rejection of a coveted spot on the United Nations Security Council last week, a move that stunned allies. The Saudi Foreign Ministry released a statement blaming the denial on the UN’s failure to “carry out its duties and responsibilities” by “allowing the ruling regime in Syria to kill and burn its people by the chemical weapons, while the world stands idly.”

The Sunni Muslim Saudis have heavily supported the rebellion against Shi’ite Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, sending mountains of money and equipment to jihadist and secular fighters alike.

Disappointed by President Obama’s failure to follow through on threatened strikes against Assad, on Tuesday Bandar said his country would cease cooperating with America in arming the Syrian rebels, some of whom Washington also supports.

Other sticking points in US-Saudi relations includes the slowdown in American aid to the ruling Egyptian military after last summer’s coup d’etat. The Saudis view Egypt as a bulwark against Islamic extremism, and have already given Egyptian generals more aid than promised by the United States.

Then there’s the rapidly-improving relations between the United States and Iran. The Obama administration has hinted it may lift sanctions against the Shi’ite theocracy if it continues to cooperate in

negotiations over its nuclear program. That infuriates the Saudi monarchy, who sees Iran as its chief rival for dominance in the Middle East.

Some experts aren't entirely sure what Saudi Arabia hopes to achieve by snubbing its most important ally. "It's unclear whether Prince Bandar's remarks reflect a decision by King Abdullah and the rest of Saudi leadership for a strategic realignment," said Majidyar, "or just a pressure tactic by the prince to get Washington to do more to topple the Syrian government and prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power."

If the Saudis are serious about cutting America loose, Majidyar worries the loss of such a "critical ally" would be devastating, with "wider implications for the Middle East's stability and American interests in the region."

Others, however, dismiss the notion that the Saudis can so easily disentangle themselves from the United States. "The Saudi leaders face a problem," said Ted Carpenter, a foreign policy researcher at the libertarian Cato Institute, in an email to TheDCNF. "They can 'shift away from the U.S.,' but there are no good options as a substitute great power ally/patron."

Carpenter argued that China's limited Middle Eastern clout and Russia's fading status make them unreliable partners, while the European Union's finite military options means they could not protect the Saudis from a dangerous adversary.

"Consequently most of what Saudi Arabia is doing amounts to posturing without much substance," said Carpenter, claiming that Riyadh "is trying to polish its credentials as a leading Arab power." While a chill in future relations between America and the Saudis is probable, "a rupture in the relationship is unlikely."

At least from the Saudi end. Last week TheDCNF reported that the United States passed Saudi Arabia as the top producer of liquid fuels, continuing an explosion in domestic energy production that may soon render America's partnership with the Saudis obsolete.