
Book Review

Is the Sun Setting on Bandar's Covert Career?

by Michele Steinberg

The Prince: The Secret Story of the World's Most Intriguing Royal

by William Simpson

New York: HarperCollins, 2006

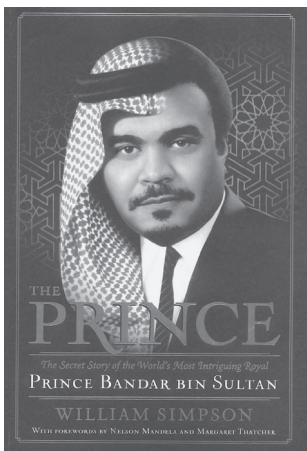
480 pages, hardcover, \$32.50

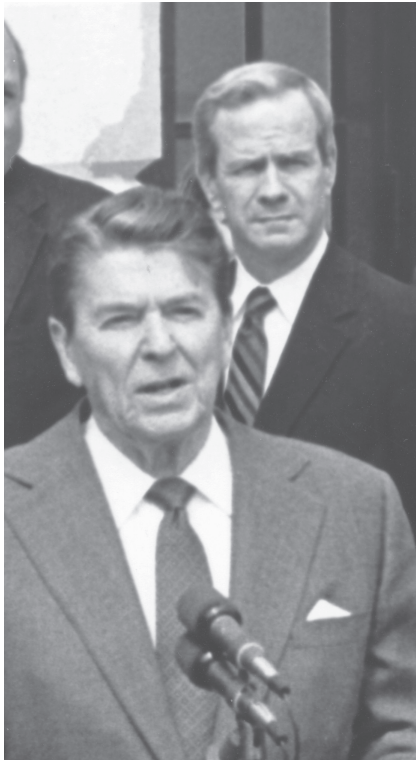
The Prince is an arrogant book—written, one assumes, as Prince Bandar bin-Sultan would like to see himself. In this sense, it could be considered a ghost-written autobiography. But for all the grandeur, the book is, at the same time, a bit of a comic-book portrayal, with Bandar, the diplomat, the fighter pilot, the jaunty billionaire, and player in world affairs, *always* succeeding, always coming off as the superhero

and self-viewed savior of the Arab and Western world. Its lack of subtlety in this respect is reminiscent of “Xena: Warrior Princess” reruns. However, this is not a book about a prince, or a diplomat; it’s the story of a “spook,” a self-styled spymaster—but one, in the context of the BAE scandal—whose luck may just have run out.

For American investigators looking into the BAE and British government’s payoffs to Bandar, the book can be useful—but only if, this time, Bandar does not escape the investigator’s noose, as he did in the 1986 Iran-Contra investigations by Congress and Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh, and in the incomplete investigations of Saudi Embassy payments to figures connected to the 9/11 hijackings. Given what is known about Bandar’s career as a top-rank money-lauderer, and funder of covert operations, the current BAE operations could indeed bring down Dick Cheney (see lead article, this section).

The Prince provides a great amount of detail on Bandar’s *modus operandi*. But the book’s most disturbing aspect is the





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According to Simpson, after Congress prohibited funding of the Nicaraguan Contras in 1985, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane (standing behind President Reagan) approached Bandar for the funds.

omission of the *consequences* of many of Bandar's "victories," including the consequences of the Prince's engineering the influx of some 3 billion Saudi dollars into the anti-Soviet Islamic fundamentalist guerrilla operations in Afghanistan in the 1980s that gave the world Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

To appreciate the omissions, however, one must first sample the portrait, according to Simpson, of Bandar's accomplishments, which took him to the top of world power politics. Simpson describes: Bandar's almost single-handed success in winning Congressional approval of the purchase of F-15 fighter aircraft, done by thoroughly charming President Jimmy Carter (1978); his absolute victory over the legendary Israeli lobby, AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), in Saudi Arabia's purchase of AWACs aircraft, against the best efforts of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1981) to stop the sale; his role with the CIA in the defeat of the Italian Communist Party in the Italian national elections, where Bandar was, in the words of Simpson, "bagman for the Pope" (1983); his alleged saving of the life of Yasser Arafat and the entire Palestinian Liberation Organization leadership from Beirut (1982); his providing \$30 million to the Nicaraguan Contras on behalf of then-Vice President George H.W. Bush's secret operations (1984-86); and his providing \$3 billion for anti-Communist guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation (1980s).

Simpson's omissions of the follow-up to some of these events are shocking. He doesn't mention that the Israelis

launched a "preventive" war attack on Iraq—obliterating the planned Osirik nuclear power plant. Similarly, while Bandar claims he made the "deal of deals" with Secretary of State Alexander Haig, in saving the PLO in Beirut, Simpson doesn't see fit to mention that horrific slaughter of Palestinian civilians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, less than three weeks later. One wonders if there was not a *quid pro quo*, giving the Israeli military, then under Ariel Sharon, a green light for these notorious attacks.

But the most glaring omission in the story is Bandar's relationship to Vice President Dick Cheney, which may prove to be the most important relationship in Bandar's career. Where every cigar puff, and sip of whiskey is recounted about Jimmy Carter, Al Haig, George W. Bush, and others, Cheney is barely mentioned.

How Bandar Operates

Reading through the eyes of an investigator into the BAE "Scandal of the Century," there are many valuable anecdotes about Bandar's covert operations. While the story of 9/11 and of BAE are still in the stages of investigation, the Iran-Contra years give a good glimpse of Bandar's prowess in money laundering. Simpson writes that in undertaking "what must be done," events sometimes require "a certain degree of secrecy and departure from the normal rules of conduct or moral codes. [And] it would be difficult to find a case more closely adhering to such a theory than the U.S.-Saudi dealings in the Iran-Contra affair."

So it was in 1985, after Congress prohibited funding of the Nicaraguan Contras, that National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane stepped in to obtain funding from Bandar. (Bandar actually claims that he was responsible for the appointment of McFarlane to replace longtime Reagan confidant Judge William Clark, as National Security Advisor). For handing this money to the Contras, Simpson reports that McFarlane gave explicit orders to Lt. Col. Oliver North (ret.): "The money should go directly from a foreign account into [Contra leader Adolfo] Calero's offshore account. It shouldn't come into this country at all. Do it with a wire transfer." Why? "...[T]he Treasury Department monitors large transfers of funds in and out of American banks. Someone was bound to notice ... and start asking questions."

An operation exactly like that described from the "Wild West" days of Iran-Contra, is believed to be the guts of the covert operations that Bandar and Cheney have cooked up in their current maneuvers around the Iraq War debacle.

Similarly, when \$10 million—Simpson claims—for deposit in a Vatican bank to stop communism in Italy, was provided by Bandar in the 1983 elections, Simpson says, "It was done with a deniability factor, because you would never see American fingerprints—or the British—on it. The money didn't come from them ... that's the way you get things done."

Details on the \$3 billion that Bandar matched in U.S. ex-

penditures in Afghanistan are less forthcoming—perhaps because of the sensitivity of the question of Osama bin Laden and the fact that al-Qaeda was developed out of the money and training given by to the Islamist mujaheddin by the United States, the British, and the Saudis. But what is provided in the book is seeing the “whiskey-drinking, cigar-smoking” Westerner, Bandar, portray himself as a passionate Muslim. In gaining support for fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, Bandar says, “we used religion. We said, ‘The

Communists are atheists; they don’t believe in religion and we are fighting them for religious reasons.’ We galvanized the Muslim world behind us . . . there was a common interest in opposing godless Communism. That was seen by the Saudis as the principle threat to the kingdom and to Islam and to the region.”

Reading *The Prince*, one sees a Bandar who is ruthless and self-aggrandizing—but the final chapter is not yet written.

Prince Bandar and 9/11

Between April 1998 and May 2002, some \$51-73,000 in checks and cashier’s checks were provided by the Saudi Ambassador to the United States and his wife to two families in southern California, who in turn bankrolled at least two of the 9/11 hijackers. The story was investigated by the 9/11 Commission, but never fully resolved, and remains, to this day, one of the key unanswered questions concerning the backing for the worst terrorist attack ever to occur on U.S. soil.

According to numerous news accounts and the records of the 9/11 Commission, in April 1998, a Saudi national named Osama Basnan wrote to the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C., seeking help for his wife, Majeda Dweikat, who needed surgery for a thyroid condition. Prince Bandar bin-Sultan, the Saudi Ambassador, wrote a check for \$15,000 to Basnan. Beginning in December 1999, Princess Haifa, the wife of Prince Bandar, began sending regular monthly cashier checks to Majeda Dweikat, in amounts ranging from \$2,000 to \$3,500. Many of these checks were signed over to Manal Bajadr, the wife of Omar al-Bayoumi, another Saudi living in the San Diego area.

Around New Year’s Day 2000, two other Saudi nationals, Nawaf Alhazmi and Khalid Almihdhar, arrived at Los Angeles International Airport, where they were greeted by al-Bayoumi, provided with cash, and outfitted with an apartment, Social Security ID cards, and other financial assistance. Al-Bayoumi helped the two Saudi men to enroll in flight schools in Florida. Two months before the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, al-Bayoumi moved to England, and shortly after that, he disappeared altogether. But before his disappearance, and within days of the 9/11 attacks, agents of New Scotland Yard, working in conjunction with the FBI, raided his apartment in England and found papers hidden beneath the floorboards, according to *Newsweek* magazine, that had the phone numbers of several officials at the Saudi Embassy in Washington. Al-Bayoumi was suspected by the Arab community in the San Diego area of being an agent of

Saudi intelligence, which kept tabs on Saudi residents in the area, particularly Saudi students attending college in southern California.

Sources have told *EIR* researchers that Basnan was also long suspected of being an agent for Saudi Arabia’s foreign intelligence service. According to the sources, Basnan was arrested for drug possession in southern California and the Saudi government intervened to get the charges dropped; Basnan also befriended Alhazmi and Almihdhar prior to their deaths on American Airlines Flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon. At one point, the Basnans, the al-Bayoumis, and the two 9/11 hijackers all lived at the Parkwood Apartments in San Diego.

Prince Bandar and Princess Haifa denied they played any role in financing the 9/11 hijackers, and claimed that they were merely providing charitable assistance to the Saudi community in the United States. The two co-chairs of the Senate Intelligence Committee at the time, Robert Graham (D-Fla.) and Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), accused the FBI of failing to fully pursue this “9/11 money trail.” Sources told *EIR* that the FBI refused to allow the committee to interview the FBI investigators who had probed the Basnan and al-Bayoumi links.

While Congressional and law enforcement sources insist to *EIR* investigators that all available leads were pursued and no compelling evidence of Saudi involvement in 9/11 was established, other U.S. intelligence sources maintain that many fruitful areas of investigation simply reached dead-ends before any final conclusions could be drawn. And these sources report that some of the Al-Yamamah funds, including some funds that passed through the Riggs Bank accounts in Washington, financed a migration of Muslim Brotherhood members to the United States, throughout the 1980s and 1990s. That hardly constitutes a smoking gun, these sources emphasize, but raises serious unanswered questions, particularly in light of the fact that the official staff reports of the 9/11 Commission featured a detailed debriefing of Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, the purported mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, who admitted that he had been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood since he was 16 years old.—*Jeffrey Steinberg*