

Pro-Israeli Saudi Royals Livid over Exclusion in U.S.-Iranian Talks

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The U.S. has historically stabbed almost every former partner and ally in the back in pursuit of its own interests -- so what's new, you inbred, corrupt Saudi Royals?

Perhaps a future that excludes Israel and a diminishing Saudi oil supplier is troublesome to some. The South Australian Coober Pedy basin contains more oil reserves than the Saudis ever had -- you have just lost your leverage, Faisal, now contend with the angry Arab masses you have screwed for centuries.

MONACO—A leading Saudi prince demanded a place for his country at talks with Iran, assailing the Obama administration for working behind Riyadh's back and panning other recent U.S. steps in the Middle East.

Prince Turki al-Faisal, an Arab royal and a brother of Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, said Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states were stunned by the secret American-Iranian diplomacy that led to the breakthrough deal between Iran and other world powers last month.

His comments in an interview with The Wall Street Journal, rare in their bluntness, came on the sidelines of a security conference here at which he publicly blistered the U.S. for its role in Syria and in the region.

The Arab royal said the failure by Washington and the United Nations to take decisive steps to end the violence in Syria—which has claimed over 130,000 lives—bordered on "criminal negligence."

Last week, the State Department said it had suspended nonlethal aid to the Syrian rebels after warehouses they controlled in northern Syria were overrun by Islamic militants with ties to al Qaeda. Saudi Arabia has armed some of those same rebels.

"The U.S. gave us the impression that they were going to do things in Syria that they finally didn't," Prince Turki said on the sidelines of the World Policy Conference in Monaco. "The aid they're giving to the Free Syrian Army is irrelevant. Now they say they're going to stop the aid: OK, stop it. It's not doing anything anyway."

Prince Turki also echoed concerns raised by Israel and members of the U.S. Congress that the interim nuclear accord with Iran didn't go far enough to ensure Tehran won't develop atomic bombs.

The talks with Iran that have been taking place in Geneva involve the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany, a diplomatic bloc called the P5+1.

"It's important for us to sit down at the same table" as the global powers, Prince Turki said. "We have been absent."

Speaking on Sunday to European and Arab business leaders, he accused the White House of blindsiding Riyadh with its overtures to Iran, Saudi Arabia's primary adversary.

Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Gulf nations are supporting the Sunni-dominated rebels in Syria, while Shiite Iran is supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad, which is dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

"What was surprising was that the talks that were going forward were kept from us," he told the World Policy Conference. "How can you build trust when you keep secrets from what are supposed to be your closest allies?"

A senior administration official on Sunday declined to comment on the state of the U.S.-Saudi relationship. But the official confirmed that the White House didn't notify Saudi Arabia about the secret talks with Iran—which were initiated at high levels last March in Oman—until this fall "when things became substantive."

The official said the U.S. has since been regularly conferring with Riyadh on the state of the nuclear talks with Iran, which resulted in an interim agreement to curb Tehran's nuclear program. U.S. and European officials said there were no plans to widen the negotiations with Iran to involve Saudi Arabia and the other leading Gulf states, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

In regards to Syria, Secretary of State John Kerry defended U.S. policy there, saying on Sunday the Obama administration continues to work toward a diplomatic solution and to unify the opposition.

"We are committed to try to bring people together...and all try to work in the same direction, which is to get a political settlement in Syria," Mr. Kerry said on ABC's "This Week."

Prince Turki currently holds no position in the Saudi government. But his previous roles as Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Washington often place him as an unofficial spokesman for the kingdom's royal family and King Abdullah, according to Arab and American officials.

The 68-year-old was a college classmate of Bill Clinton's at Georgetown University and coordinated closely with the Central Intelligence Agency in arming and training the Afghan rebels fighting the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

The Iranian nuclear accord rattled the Middle East and the Arab states who are in a competition with Tehran for influence in countries like Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The deal is also under attack from Israel and leading members of Congress, who fear it doesn't do enough to dismantle Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Tehran says its program is purely for civilian purposes.

The Geneva agreement calls for Tehran to freeze for six months the most dangerous parts of its nuclear program, including the production of near weapons-grade fuel, in exchange for the easing of some Western sanctions. During that period, Tehran and the P5+1 will seek to forge a more comprehensive deal to end the nuclear threat.

The interim agreement has appeared fragile in recent days.

On Friday, Iranian diplomats abruptly walked out of talks in Vienna focused on implementing the Geneva accord after the Obama administration barred from international trade roughly a dozen Iranian companies that the U.S. said were violating sanctions on Iran's nuclear program.

Iran's government said the American designations violated the terms of the agreement, even though the U.S. said the companies were blacklisted under previously established laws.

The discord over the agreement could also be felt in Monaco, where Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was supposed to join Prince Turki as a keynote speaker at the forum.

At the last moment, however, Mr. Zarif pulled out, citing his mother's ill health. Conference organizers believed Iran's displeasure over the new U.S. penalties were the reason for the Iranian foreign minister's absence.

Still, Mr. Zarif told CBS News on Sunday that the talks with the P5+1 would continue, despite the American sanctions.

In his place, Iran's ambassador to France said in Monaco that the actions taken by the U.S. would undercut the ability of Mr. Zarif and President Hasan Rouhani to make good on their pledges to improve relations with Washington and the West.

"We hope Congress and other interests in the U.S. won't throw a spanner in the works," said Ambassador Ali Ahani. "President Rouhani has promised the Iranian people prior to his election that he'd seriously try to settle the matter. If he's able to settle it, this will be a very positive point."

Prince Turki this weekend also reasserted his government's frustration with Mr. Obama's unwillingness to aggressively take steps to arm the Syrian rebels seeking to topple Mr. Assad or to follow through on proposed military strikes this summer against his regime.

The Arab royal stressed that relations between Washington and Riyadh have waxed and waned since diplomatic ties were formally established in the 1930s. But he said that the stark differences over Iran and Syria, as well as the stalemate over American-led efforts to create an independent Palestinian state, have left the Saudi-American alliance in a "process of evolution."

"Obviously...there are differences between us and the U.S.," Prince Turki said. "We have a huge defense and security agreement with the United States, forestalling terrorist attacks. That's ongoing without any problems."

—Carol E. Lee in Washington contributed to this article.

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