

THE MIDDLE EAST: The House of Saud: [Main Edition]

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Abstract

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The urbane, intellectually minded Turki was the long-serving head of Saudi intelligence before being posted to London as the kingdom's envoy. He subsequently succeeded Bandar as Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, but quit abruptly in December, after just 15 months. Speculation abounds that he left following his criticism of the back- channels employed by his cousin, Bandar, in managing the relationship with the United States.

Full Text

Abdul Aziz ibn Saud took control of Arabia in 1932 and proclaimed himself king, renaming the unified nation Saudi Arabia after his family line. He was greatly helped in his endeavors by his family's alliance with Wahhabi clerics, who promulgated a puritanical form of Islam.

The king fathered 42 sons by 16 wives, creating a royal headache for succession. The current ruler is King Abdullah, one of ibn- Saud's sons, who is older than 80. He succeeded his brother King Fahd, who died in 2005. Crown Prince Sultan is another octogenarian son of the kingdom's founder.

Under a loose agreement, each of the top princes is supposed to have a turn on the throne, followed by their own sons. But in a significant rule change announced last month, a constitutional reform removed the king's authority to choose his own successor.

In the future, a committee consisting of all 21 surviving sons of Abdul Aziz, plus representatives of sons deceased or incapable, will vote for the crown prince from three candidates named by the king. The new selection process is expected to be used only after the current crown prince, Sultan, has become king.

The princelings expected to vie for the throne in the future include:

Prince Bandar bin Sultan

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Prince Turki al-Faisal

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Prince Muhammad bin Fahd

A son of King Fahd, Muhammad is the governor of the oil-rich Eastern Province. Like his royal cousins, he is known to be extremely wealthy. In 1998 the London Sunday Times estimated that Muhammad ran up \$1 billion in personal expenses in the last decade. His excessive

pursuits of pleasure, in particular his reported fondness for the gaming tables, have tarnished his reputation in his homeland.

Prince Khalid bin Sultan

The son of Crown Prince and Defense Minister Sultan, Khalid was born in 1949. He has a master's degree in political science from Auburn University, trained at the British Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and at the U.S. Army Command General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. He was named as the commander of the Joint Arab Forces during the Persian Gulf War. He left after the war, in 1991, to concentrate on his business interests, but returned in 2001 as an assistant defense minister.

Sources: CIA World Factbook; Encyclopedia Britannica; staff research and news reports.

--- Research by Alice Wertheim

CAPTION: ClipArt.com In 1945, King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to discuss the Saudi-U.S. relations. Today, the United States still plays a significant role in the Middle East.

CAPTION: Saudi King Abdullah

CAPTION: Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan

CAPTION: Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal

CAPTION: Saudi Prince Muhammad bin Fahd

CAPTION: Saudi Prince Khalid bin Sultan

Credit: STAFF

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Details

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