

Saudi-American Forum



SAF Item of Interest

April 30, 2003

The Prince

by Elsa Walsh

How the Saudi Ambassador became Washington's indispensable operator.

During the first weeks of the second Bush Administration, the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, met with the new President. Bandar, who is fifty-three and has been the Saudi Ambassador for twenty years, was accustomed to an unusually personal relationship with the White House; he was so close to the President's father, George H. W. Bush, that he was considered almost a member of the family. The Saudi Ambassador had been happy about the younger Bush's victory, but he was worn out by the unpublicized role he had played in the failed negotiations to resolve the Middle East crisis during the last weeks of the Clinton Presidency.

President Clinton had been working on a compromise for years; after the Monica Lewinsky scandal, he had called this effort part of his "personal journey of atonement." Bush had been briefed on the collapse of the talks and was baffled by Yasir Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian Authority. "Explain one thing to me," he said to Bandar. "I cannot believe somebody will not strike a deal with two desperate people."

When Bandar asked what Bush meant by "desperate," Bush explained: President Clinton had been eager to leave office with a settlement in the Middle East, and Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, needed a deal to survive the next election. Bush said that he didn't think Arafat really wanted to solve the problem. Bandar believed that Arafat's failure to accept the deal in January of 2001 was a tragic mistake—a crime, really. Yet to say so publicly would damage the Palestinian cause, which had been championed by the Saudis, who would then lose any leverage they still had. Bush told Bandar that, unlike Clinton, he did not intend to intervene aggressively.

Bandar left the meeting even more distressed. At the end of the Clinton Presidency, Bandar had received confidential assurances from Colin Powell, the Secretary of State-designate, that he was to relay to Arafat: the Middle East deal made by Clinton that the new Administration endorsed would be enforced. Powell warned that the "peace process" would be different under Bush. Bush would not spend hours on the telephone, and Camp David was not going to become a motel. The message was clear, and until the end Bandar had continued to hope: it appeared that Arafat would get almost everything he wanted, and that Bush's Administration, which Bandar saw as more tough-minded than Clinton's, would stand behind the agreement.

"I still have not recovered, to be honest with you, inside, from the magnitude of the missed opportunity that January," Bandar told me at his home in McLean, Virginia. "Sixteen hundred

Palestinians dead so far. And seven hundred Israelis dead. In my judgment, not one life of those Israelis and Palestinians dead is justified."

We met in late November, during Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, and Bandar had invited me to break the day's fast with him. Steel barriers block the way to the house, which overlooks the Potomac River, and I had passed through a security checkpoint, where commandos in khaki pants and vests inspected my car for explosives. Bandar has a full, expressive face and a boisterous laugh. He usually wears European clothes when meeting Westerners, but on that evening he wore the traditional Saudi dress—a white caftan and sandals. He was eagerly relighting a slim cigar (smoking, too, is banned during fasting hours). On the table were nearly two dozen dishes of rice, stews, beans, and breads. We were in a dining room with a hand-painted mural of Washington, D.C., as a backdrop. Bandar pointed to the small jet rounding the Monument, an image commissioned by his wife, Princess Haifa, in a nod to Bandar's years as a fighter pilot for the Royal Saudi Air Force.

That week had not been a good one, but neither had any week for more than a year—not since September 11, 2001, when nineteen hijackers, Islamic fundamentalists, attacked the United States, and fifteen of them were identified as Saudi nationals. There were a great many news stories reporting that hundreds of millions of dollars have gone from Saudi companies and charities to extremist groups, including Al Qaeda. Late last year, it turned out that Princess Haifa had made a charitable donation that ended up in the bank account of the wife of a man who helped two of the hijackers. F.B.I. and Justice Department officials later said that the financial trail was indirect: a check from the Princess, intended for a Jordanian woman married to a Saudi who needed an operation, had been endorsed to someone else. But the reaction in the press and from some politicians was harsh: What side were the Saudis on? "I felt like the whole world fell on my head," Haifa told me, in January, sitting in her living room. She is a tall woman with shoulder-length hair that is streaked with gray. "How can I want to help these people when they want our downfall?" she asked. Laura Bush called to sympathize; so did George H. W. Bush and his wife, Barbara. "I felt horribly about the attacks on her," the elder Bush wrote to me.

The Saudi connection to September 11th was not Bandar's first crisis, but it has certainly been his worst. In the Reagan era, he was exposed as an intermediary in the Iran-Contra affair; it was Bandar who arranged for thirty-two million dollars in Saudi financing for the Nicaraguan Contras. The Saudi Ambassador operated at times in the shadows of diplomacy. But now Bandar was working to save the reputation of his own country, a nation where Wahhabism, an extreme and rigidly austere version of Islam, was routinely taught and practiced. (The Wahhabis believe in a literal interpretation of the Koran and in their duty to convert or rid their nation of non-Wahhabi Muslims.) Americans seemed to be looking at his country with fresh eyes, and they saw a place with anti-democratic institutions, with a royal family that ruled with oil money, and with a population that was virulently anti-American. On the night he heard that fifteen of the hijackers were Saudis, Bandar said, "I was shocked. I was depressed. I was angry. Then it dawned on me that every fight I had in this town—political fight—I had it with Congress, with the Administration, but I always felt very comfortable as far as public opinion is concerned. This time, I thought, I have no problems with the Administration or Congress or even with the media, in a sense. But Joe Six-Pack is not going to understand now the fine differences."

Bandar, the senior diplomat in Washington, has served under four American Presidents, and has been the emissary to, among others, Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev, Saddam Hussein, and the Chinese government. He is a man of exuberant charm; he is also flashy, cunning, secretive, and, at times, ruthless ("a.k.a. 'Mr. Smoothie' " is how the Times columnist William Safire has referred to him). Unlike most ambassadors, Bandar has unprecedented access to the President and to most senior American officials. On the night that we met in McLean, George Tenet, the director of the C.I.A., stopped by for a quick meeting, and when I visited Bandar last month he received a telephone call from Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national-security adviser. Rice was checking on Saudi efforts to persuade the French to support a second U.N. resolution calling on Iraq to disarm. Some think that Bandar exaggerates his influence and his presence, but his name shows up repeatedly in any recounting of the political events of the past twenty years-in particular as a fixer of problems that cannot be solved in the open. According to an authoritative Israeli source, Ehud Barak thought that in many cases Bandar's intercession was more effective than that of the American peacekeeping team. "At the end of the day, who can deliver is who wins the battle," Bandar told me.

Bandar lives in two worlds, and the ease with which he moves between them has made him a natural intermediary. He is a member of the Saudi royal family-the son of the Defense Minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, who is second in line to the Crown. He is widely regarded as pragmatic and non-ideological, and sensitive to the subtleties of complex and emotional issues. He is fond of American colloquialisms and American history, and he likes Big Macs served on silver platters. "I am more Alexander Hamilton ideals than Jeffersonian Democrat," he likes to say, referring to his conservative political leanings. He travels frequently on his private Airbus A-340; since December, he has travelled six times between Washington and Saudi Arabia, with stops in Pakistan, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Paris, and London, carrying messages between Bush and Crown Prince Abdullah, the de-facto Saudi ruler, and other heads of state. When I saw him last week, he had just returned from Riyadh; the first people he saw were Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney.

He has the ability to focus intimately on the person in front of him, laughing and trading gossip, and he speaks animatedly, his eyes and hands in constant motion. He has always known how to make friends with important people and with people who will someday be important. Nancy Reagan used him to relay messages to her husband's Cabinet; he played racquetball with Colin Powell in the seventies. (Powell lives nearby in McLean, and the two see each other frequently.) One of our interviews lasted for seven hours, until nearly midnight; afterward, Bandar went to the airport to leave for Saudi Arabia. I had not known that he was going until he stood up and put on a lambskin-lined full-length desert coat and joined the waiting motorcade. "A long time ago, when I was young and immature and aggressive, a Jewish car salesman in Alabama told me, 'Make your words soft and sweet-you never know when you have to eat them.' I never forgot it. That phrase has saved my rear end, my royal rear end, so many times."

A few months after September 11th, Bandar went to Aspen, where he has a thirty-two-room mansion. A major part of his success, one foreign leader told me, was that Bandar could be trusted to convey King Fahd's private views when they differed from his public statements. Bandar had gone to Aspen to relax, but also to do a little housecleaning in a place that has fewer diversions than Washington. He had brought with him sixteen of thirty or so locked attache

cases that he keeps in McLean. They contain evidence of the covert operations and secret agreements that Bandar coordinated at the behest of King Fahd and the United States, mostly during the Reagan era—such as records of a Swiss bank account that Bandar had personally set up for the Nicaraguan Contras. In the nineties, Bandar helped persuade the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi to turn over two suspects in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. (Privately, Bandar has called Qaddafi "a Jerry Lewis trying to be a Churchill.") In the late nineties, in appreciation for Saudi help in resolving the Pan Am Flight 103 case, the Libyans made an extraordinary offer: to share information with the United States about Osama bin Laden, whom the Saudis had stripped of citizenship five years earlier. (By one account, the Libyans actually offered to assassinate bin Laden, which made Tenet particularly uneasy. A spokesman for former President Clinton says that the Administration was unaware of that offer, but he acknowledged that the Libyans had provided intelligence help.) Libya was the first country to seek an international arrest warrant for bin Laden, because of terrorist activity there.

Most of the details of these operations were known to only three people: Bandar, Fahd (who was incapacitated by a series of strokes in 1995), and William Casey, the former C.I.A. director, who died in 1987. I later asked Prince Turki bin Faisal, the former chief of the Saudi intelligence services and Bandar's brother-in-law, whether he had known about Bandar's less savory covert activities. "Bandar operated outside the norm," he told me. "He conducted secret operations out of normal channels, with King Fahd's permission and blessing, that I was not aware of." Turki, who is the youngest son of King Faisal, has a low-key manner and is considered one of the most Westernized of the Saudi leaders. He said that he understood the special relationship between Bandar and Fahd. Turki told me that, as King, his father once said, "When you are working with your uncles, remember that they are your uncles, and they may want to do something that they don't want you to know about."

In the early eighties, Bandar began having regular lunches with Vice-President George Bush, in his office at the Old Executive Office Building. Although Bush was widely considered a weak Vice-President, Bandar believed that he was the first important American politician he'd known who did not automatically favor Israel; from the start, Bandar had found Bush helpful in advancing the Saudi cause, and supportive of Saudi efforts to buy weapons from the United States. Bandar also liked him personally.

In 1985, Bandar threw a lavish party for Bush, who never forgot the courtesy, and always had time for the Saudi Ambassador. "Most important, he was a troubleshooter for King Fahd," Brent Scowcroft, Bush's national-security adviser, wrote of Bandar in a joint memoir with Bush. "The King frequently turned to him for advice. For these reasons, we knew he was a special conduit from us to Fahd."

The major event of the first Bush Administration was Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, on the northern border of Saudi Arabia, and the subsequent Persian Gulf War. Just four months earlier, Bandar had met with Saddam Hussein, at Fahd's request, to discuss a speech in which Saddam, boasting of his country's chemical weapons, had said, "By God, we will make the fire eat up half of Israel if it tries to do anything against Iraq." The speech was condemned by the Bush Administration, and Saddam wanted Bandar to tell the Administration that his words were being misinterpreted—he had no intention of attacking Israel unless he was attacked first. In return, he

wanted the Americans to persuade Israel not to attack Iraq. These messages were conveyed, but when Iraq invaded Kuwait, Bandar realized that Saddam had duped everyone—he had got free passage into Kuwait. It looked as if Saddam's real target was Saudi Arabia and its oil fields.

But a smaller moment may have cemented the bond between the elder Bush and Bandar. When George and Barbara Bush visited the troops in Saudi Arabia during the Thanksgiving holiday in 1990, Bush called Bandar, who was in Saudi Arabia at the time. Bandar went to the private quarters in the royal palace where the Bushes were staying. Bush had tears in his eyes, and Bandar, worried, asked what had happened. Bush explained that Dorothy, their recently divorced daughter, was alone at the White House with her children. They had called her from the airplane and learned that Bandar's wife, Haifa, had invited Doro and her children to spend Thanksgiving with her. ("I don't have parents now," Haifa told me. "The Bushes are like my mother and father. I know if ever I needed anything I could go to them.")

On the day before the 1992 election, Bandar was in Houston; at around two in the morning, unable to sleep, he wrote an emotional letter to Bush in which he expressed gratitude to Bush for saving his country. "You are my friend for life, one of my family," he wrote. "Tomorrow you win either way. If you win, you deserve it, and if you lose you are in good company," and he reminded Bush that Churchill had won the war but lost the election. Bandar had the letter delivered at four in the morning. At around six that evening, Bush called; the exit polls were showing a Clinton victory. "It's over," Bush said. (Bush recently confirmed that he had received this letter from Bandar.) "It was like I lost one of my family, dead," Bandar said. He told the King that he wanted to resign.

Back in Washington, on a Saturday a few weeks later, Bandar got a call from Bush, inviting him and the family to Camp David for lunch. "Can we have a sort of Wasp lunch, meaning at eleven-thirty, twelve, not an Arab lunch, at three or four?" Bandar asked, explaining that the Dallas Cowboys, the team he roots for, were playing the Redskins the next day and he wanted to be home to watch the game. The owner of the Cowboys was expected for dinner.

It was the first time Bandar had seen Bush since the defeat, and the gathering had an awkward feeling. After lunch, Bush and Bandar went for a walk. As they started up a steep incline on the trail, Bush explained that every world leader who visited had been put to the test: Gorbachev, John Major, Helmut Kohl. (Kohl had stopped halfway up the hill, Bush said.) Bandar was not sure what to say. Sorry you lost? They kept walking. Eventually, Bandar recalled, Bush told him to ask King Fahd to help the new President; Bandar decided to remain as Ambassador. "To this day," the former President wrote to me, "Bandar is the only person besides the President of the United States that Bar lets smoke in our house, although both have to do it in their room with the door closed."

Bandar's father is Prince Sultan, one of the seven sons of Abdul Aziz, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia, and his favorite wife, Hassa bint Ahmed al-Sudairi, who is perhaps the most revered woman in Saudi history. Sultan, who was in his early twenties at the time of Bandar's birth, had already held the position of governor of Riyadh. But Bandar's mother, Khizaran, was a dark-skinned sixteen-year-old commoner from the Asir Province, one of the southernmost points in Saudi Arabia. She could not read or write; she later taught herself. Bandar, who sees her

regularly, says that she was a concubine. He lived with his mother and his aunt, and had little contact with his father when he was very young. "It taught me patience, and a defense mechanism, if you want, to not expect anything," he told me. "And the way I rationalized it to myself was if I don't expect anything and I don't get anything, I don't get disappointed. So nobody can hurt my feelings."

Under Sharia, the Islamic law that governs Saudi Arabia, all sons are born equal, even if they are illegitimate. But Bandar was eight years old before he entered his father's bedroom for the first time. "One day at school I heard from one of my brothers that Daddy was sick, and I didn't understand how sick or how serious it was," he told me. "But I was a little too proud to ask people or to show people I didn't know." Sultan heard of Bandar's concern and summoned him. When Bandar arrived, he pulled the young boy onto his bed. "It was like he gave me the whole world," Bandar told me.

Bandar's isolation from the family ended when he was eleven. Abdul Aziz had died several years earlier, and it was decided that Bandar and his mother should live with his grandmother Hassa, in the palace. "It was a practical decision, but it completely altered my life," Bandar told me. Each day at 5 a.m., Hassa would wake up her grandson for prayers. After prayers, she told him the history of the House of Saud. "She was not educated, but she had learned the Koran by heart," Bandar recalled. "She was a combination of Maggie Thatcher and Mother Teresa. She was very pious, yet very strong-willed." He worshipped her, and she returned the affection. "She was the most influential figure in my life," he said.

"Living with her opened up his eyes," a close friend of Bandar's told me. "Hassa taught him about life, about women, about politics, about what a great man his grandfather was. She made him feel special, and it was at that point that his relationship with his father began."

Even then, Bandar told me, his contact with his father was limited. "My memory of him as a child was that he was always working at his papers or talking on the telephone," Prince Khaled bin Sultan, Bandar's half brother, wrote in a memoir. An outsider like Bandar would have to try hard, to amuse, to be useful. When Bandar was thirteen, Sultan was named Defense Minister, and three years later Bandar, in a move surely intended to please his father, enrolled in the Royal Air Force College, at Cranwell, England, to train as a fighter pilot. (Bandar, then sixteen, had a doctor alter his birth certificate by a year in order to qualify.) But he also joined, he told me, because he'd always felt somewhat uncertain of the attention people showed him: "I didn't feel I did anything to earn it except by happenstance, circumstance. Just because my father is a prince, I became a prince. I never worked a day in my life to be one. Compare that with my feeling when I got commissioned a second lieutenant. I was so proud."

Even then, expectations for Bandar were not high. "He wasn't sent to Eton," a close Saudi friend said. "He was not given great opportunity. He was sent to military school. You do not send someone to military school to get a great opportunity." (Bandar has sent some of his sons to Eton.)

Bandar excelled at flying. "Really the only thing I wanted to do in my life was fly an airplane and be ready when called upon to be a warrior," he told me. At Cranwell, he began to develop

the swashbuckling personality that some Westerners have found so appealing. Walking into a local pub one day, a lonely Bandar found a group of classmates drinking yard-long flasks of beer. He asked to join them, and although alcohol was banned in Saudi Arabia, Bandar stayed through the night.

When Bandar returned to Saudi Arabia three years later, he was determined to show that he was more than Sultan's son. "When I am fifty feet upside down and I don't crash, it has nothing to do with my dad or my granddad or anybody. It is me and I am good," he said. He became the Saudi Air Force's chief acrobatics artist. Turki told me about a day when Sultan was sitting with King Faisal, Turki's father, and King Hussein of Jordan reviewing a Saudi military parade. Bandar was flying acrobatic maneuvers, and at one point his plane appeared to shoot straight up, showering a spray of exhaust over everyone. Faisal, who did not know the identity of the pilot, was not pleased. "Bandar wanted to do it because the two kings were there, and probably he wanted to show King Hussein, who was himself a pilot, what Saudi pilots can do," Turki told me.

Flying also gave Bandar an opportunity to differentiate himself from the other young princes, who tended to favor the good life. The distinction paid off with Haifa, the youngest daughter of King Faisal, who was educated in Saudi Arabia and Switzerland. The first time Haifa saw Bandar, she said, "I had a feeling I would marry this man." She was sixteen. Although they were cousins, they hadn't grown up together, and four years passed before they met again. "It was not a prearranged marriage," she said with emphasis. Queen Iffat, Haifa's mother, had been a friend of Bandar's grandmother, and she, too, liked Bandar. He and Haifa were married in 1972, and they have eight children.

In 1978, Turki ran into Bandar at the Madison Hotel in downtown Washington. Bandar, then a major in the Saudi Air Force, was in Washington on Saudi military business. Bandar's career as a pilot had come to an end the year before, when he crash-landed his jet and suffered severe back injuries, and he had decided to work his way up through the military. Turki was then lobbying Congress to approve the \$2.5-billion sale of sixty F-15 fighter jets to the Saudis. Acquiring the jets was extremely important to the King, who worried about the oil fields, but the talks were going poorly; although the sale was strongly supported by President Carter, its opponents included the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the most influential Jewish lobby. Turki was getting a cool reception on the Hill, and was having trouble answering technical questions from members of Congress. He asked Bandar to help.

One of Bandar's first stops was the Oval Office, where Carter asked him to fly to California and win the support of Ronald Reagan, the former governor, which he did. Then, with the F-15 vote still pending, Carter asked Bandar to help persuade Senator James Abourezk, a Democrat from South Dakota and the first Arab-American elected to the Senate, to support the Panama Canal treaty, which needed his vote for passage. Soon afterward, Fahd asked Bandar to be an emissary to Carter for him, sometimes acting without the Saudi Ambassador's knowledge. "He was only a major, but something about his presence sucked up all the authority in the room," Colin Powell wrote of the first time he met Bandar, in 1978, in a briefing room in Saudi Arabia. A year later, Bandar enrolled in a master's program at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, in Washington. Powell, then military assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, was

naturally drawn to Bandar, and the two began playing racquetball at the Pentagon Officers Athletic Club. In Powell's memoir, "My American Journey," he wrote:

I remember Prince Bandar coming out of the POAC after our first game. He had a gym bag slung over his shoulder. He flicked it off with a shrug, and an aide materialized out of the woodwork and caught it. The prince extended his hand into empty space, and pulled it back with a Coke can in it. It is good to be a prince, I thought. In the years to follow, we would often work together, and the vast social gulf between us began to shrink until the familiarity between the kid from the South Bronx and the prince from a royal palace approached the outrageous and the profane.

In 1982, after Reagan became President, Fahd made Bandar the military attache at the Saudi Embassy, a move that Bandar thought would end his career. But the following year, not long after Fahd became king, Bandar became the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. "When I first got to America, I didn't understand politics," Bandar said. "I was confused by it. Then it became like a game, like a drug. I enjoyed the game. It was exotic and exciting. There was no blood drawn. It was physically safe, but emotionally tough."

Bandar's relationship with Bill Clinton began when Clinton was the governor of Arkansas and asked the Saudis to help pay for a center for Middle East studies at the University of Arkansas. Bandar saw Clinton as an international romantic. "He gets excited by the possibility of talking to his enemy and converting him," he told me while Clinton was still President. "If Clinton leaves office . . . and doesn't have a relationship with Cuba, North Korea, Iran, or Libya, he will feel internally that he has not accomplished his mission." Bandar says that he liked Clinton; he had a first-class brain and could sell anything to anybody. But Bandar had problems with what he called a "weak-dicked" foreign-policy team, finding its members too political, or culturally arrogant, while they, in turn, found him manipulative and untrustworthy. "It's classic Bandar to set one person against another," a top Clinton Administration official told me; he asked for anonymity, because, he said, "Bandar has me in his sights." Bandar's relationship with Samuel (Sandy) Berger, Clinton's national-security adviser, was particularly tense, and became more so when Clinton, near the end of his term, tried to broker a broad peace plan between Israel and several Arab countries.

On a weekend in March of 2000, Clinton summoned the Saudi Ambassador to the White House, a meeting also attended by Berger and Bandar's charge d'affaires, Rihab Massoud. Clinton told Bandar that he needed his help in arranging a summit with the Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad-which Clinton saw as a prelude to a larger plan for peace between Israel and the Arab states. Assad was known to trust Bandar, and Bandar's participation was secretly endorsed by Ehud Barak. "I know what President Assad wants," Clinton said; according to Bandar's version, Assad wanted Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights, and to the borders that were taken in the 1967 war. As Bandar recalled, Clinton planned to pressure Barak to satisfy Assad's demands; if he succeeded, he would call for a summit. Bandar asked Clinton to repeat all this, and told Massoud to write it down and repeat it to Clinton. Clinton also wanted Bandar to ask Assad to quiet the fighting in South Lebanon.

That night, Bandar flew to Saudi Arabia to consult with Crown Prince Abdullah; from there he

went to Syria, where he met with Assad and his Foreign Minister, Farouk al-Shaara. Assad, according to Bandar's account, asked him to repeat Clinton's message three times. "Clinton knows what I want," Assad said. "God knows he knows what I want. We have spoken fifteen times." Bandar was unaware that the two men had had so much contact. When Bandar mentioned the fighting in South Lebanon, Shaara interrupted to say that they had no influence. Assad reportedly smiled and said that he thought they could take care of the problem.

"Bingo," Bandar told Berger. Clinton was leaving the next day for India and Pakistan, and Berger told Bandar that if Clinton got what he needed from Barak they would set up a summit with Assad.

Word leaked out that Assad was going to Geneva to meet with Clinton. Since Assad was reluctant to travel-Barak privately called him the President of Albania, because he hated to leave home-this led to speculation that something major was about to happen. But no announcement followed the meeting, which lasted for three hours; there were rumors that Assad had not accepted Clinton's offer-had in fact impatiently dismissed Clinton's proposals. Later, the Syrians told the Saudis that the Americans had not offered them the deal that Assad had been promised. The collapse of the talks was viewed as a serious failure. The Crown Prince, worried that Assad would now think that the Saudis had tried to trick the Syrians, told Bandar to return to Syria and explain exactly what Clinton had told him. "To hell with this Administration," Bandar said to himself.

Several days later, Bandar had dinner with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who had been in Geneva for the summit. Bandar liked Albright, and admired her toughness. At dinner, by Bandar's account, Albright immediately complained about Assad. Before the summit, she said, Assad kept saying that he wanted to know Barak's bottom line, and so Clinton sent Dennis Ross, the special Middle East envoy, to find out.

After a few more minutes of conversation, it became clear to Bandar that Albright had no idea that Clinton had asked him to take a message to Assad. "Son of a bitch," Albright said, apparently angry that Berger had left her out of the preliminary talks. "That Sandy."

Albright told Bandar that in a meeting with Clinton-apparently three days before Bandar's meeting-they had agreed to send Ross to Israel. "Now I understand why Assad looked so stupid to me," Bandar remembers Albright saying-referring to Assad's apparent refusal to listen to Clinton. Bandar asked Albright to tell the President that, from then on, he would discuss Middle East issues only if both Albright and Berger were in the room.

Albright told me that she "certainly had the dinner" with Bandar, but did not think she would have used expletives to describe Berger. "I'm sure I was annoyed with Sandy," she said, "because I had not been told that Bandar was carrying this message" to Assad.

I later asked Dennis Ross about the Saudi version, and he acknowledged that he had learned about Bandar's meeting with Clinton after the fact, though he did know Bandar was going to talk to Assad. "Had I been in on the meeting with the President, given my ear, I would have known how Bandar would hear what the President was saying to him," Ross said. He added, "He was

bound to interpret it the way he did." Nonetheless, Ross went on, "Bandar is right that there was a misunderstanding, at least in terms of what he said to Assad. . . . If Assad had listened and had suddenly been disappointed, I could have understood it. But he didn't listen. He was saying no from the beginning of the meeting." Still, he said, Bandar was always honest with him and had played a significant role in the peace negotiations. "He always did what he said he was going to do," Ross said. A spokesman for the Clinton Administration said that neither Clinton nor Berger could specifically recall the Oval Office meeting. "It is true that we asked for Bandar's help on this with Assad, but it is not true that Clinton said he could deliver the 1967 borders," the spokesman said.

An aide to Bandar, however, said, "How could we misinterpret it?" Nothing short of Clinton's assurances would have lured Assad to a summit, the aide said. "With Assad it was not this or that. It was not get half or three-quarters or seven-eighths," he continued. "Nothing could be clearer."

Clinton, who continued to apply his considerable energy to finding a Middle East solution, came to believe, in December of 2000, that he had finally found a formula for peace; he asked once more for Bandar's help. Bandar's first reaction was not to get involved; the Syrian summit had failed, and talks between Barak and Arafat at Camp David, in July, had collapsed. But when Dennis Ross showed Bandar the President's talking papers Bandar recognized that in its newest iteration the peace plan was a remarkable development. It gave Arafat almost everything he wanted, including the return of about ninety-seven per cent of the land of the occupied territories; all of Jerusalem except the Jewish and Armenian quarters, with Jews preserving the right to worship at the Temple Mount; and a thirty-billion-dollar compensation fund.

Arafat told Crown Prince Abdullah that he wanted Bandar's help with the negotiations. "There's not much I can do unless Arafat is willing to understand that this is it," Bandar told the Crown Prince.

On January 2, 2001, Bandar picked up Arafat at Andrews Air Force Base and reviewed the plan with him. Did he think he could get a better deal? Bandar asked. Did he prefer Sharon to Barak? he continued, referring to the upcoming election in Israel. Of course not, Arafat replied. Barak's negotiators were doves, Bandar went on, and said, "Since 1948, every time we've had something on the table we say no. Then we say yes. When we say yes, it's not on the table anymore. Then we have to deal with something less. Isn't it about time we say yes?" Bandar added, "We've always said to the Americans, 'Our red line is Jerusalem. You get us a deal that's O.K. on Jerusalem and we're going, too.' "

Arafat said that he understood, but still Bandar issued something of an ultimatum: "Let me tell you one more time. You have only two choices. Either you take this deal or we go to war. If you take this deal, we will all throw our weight behind you. If you don't take this deal, do you think anybody will go to war for you?" Arafat was silent. Bandar continued, "Let's start with the big country, Egypt. You think Egypt will go to war with you?" Arafat had had his problems with Egypt, too. No, he said. "I'll prove it to you, just to confirm," Bandar went on. Bandar called the Egyptian Ambassador. Bandar reported that the Egyptian Ambassador, who was to join them shortly, was willing to support the peace process. "Is Jordan going to go to war? Syria go to war?"

So, Mr. Arafat, what are you losing?"

When Nabil Fahmy, the Egyptian Ambassador, joined them, at the Ritz-Carlton, Bandar repeated much of his advice. Arafat said that he would accept Clinton's proposal, with one condition: he wanted Saudi Arabia and Egypt to give him political cover and support. Bandar and Fahmy assured him that they would, and Arafat left for the White House.

Arafat was supposed to return to Bandar's house after his meeting with Clinton and, with the Egyptian Ambassador present, call the Crown Prince and President Mubarak. After three hours, when Arafat still hadn't shown up, the Egyptian Ambassador told Bandar that something must have gone wrong. Bandar, too, was worried and called Arafat's security detail. Arafat had left the White House twenty minutes earlier, he was told, and was back at the Ritz. When Bandar called, Arafat said that he needed to talk to him at once. George Tenet, the C.I.A. director, was on his way to the hotel to discuss the plan, and Arafat was then supposed to return to the White House. Bandar, accompanied by the Egyptian Ambassador, hurried to the Ritz.

Arafat said that the meeting with Clinton had been "excellent," but Bandar did not believe him; he thought that Arafat's staff looked as if they had just come from a funeral. The Egyptian Ambassador later privately remarked that Arafat looked dead. Bandar asked Arafat if he wanted to talk to the Crown Prince or President Mubarak. No, Arafat replied. He said that he'd had a great time with the President, but the meeting had turned sour when Dennis Ross joined them. Yet, he went on, he and Clinton were in agreement. Bandar, concealing his disbelief, said that was good news. Soon after this exchange, Bandar got a note from a security officer, which said, "Urgent. Call the President." In the corridor, Bandar called the White House and reached Berger.

"Congratulations," Bandar said, loudly and sarcastically, for he knew by then that the talks had failed. On what? Berger asked. "Arafat is telling me you guys have a deal." Not true, Berger said, adding that he and Clinton had made it clear to Arafat that this was his last chance. Please, Berger said, tell Arafat that this is it. "It's too late," Bandar recalls saying. "That should have happened with the White House, not with me." (A spokesman for Clinton recalled, "At one point, Clinton said, 'It's five minutes to twelve, Mr. Chairman, and you are going to lose the best and maybe the only opportunity that your people will have to solve this problem on satisfactory grounds by not being able to make a decision.' . . . The Israelis accepted. They said they had reservations and Arafat never accepted.")

Bandar believed that the White House had hurt its cause by not pressing an ultimatum. Arafat, though, was committing a crime against the Palestinians-in fact, against the entire region. If it weren't so serious, Bandar thought, it would be a comedy. He returned to Arafat's room and sat down, trying to remember: "Make your words soft and sweet." Bandar began, "Mr. President, I want to be sure now. You're telling me you struck a deal?" When Arafat said it was so, Bandar, still hiding his fury, offered his congratulations. His wife and children were waiting for him in Aspen, he said, and he wanted to go. Bandar could see the life draining out of Arafat. He started to leave, then turned around. "I hope you remember, sir, what I told you. If we lose this opportunity, it is not going to be a tragedy. This is going to be a crime." When Bandar looked at Arafat's staff, their faces showed incredulity.

The next evening, a White House spokesman said that Arafat had agreed to accept Clinton's proposals, with reservations, only as the basis for new talks. Arafat said later that he had not been offered as much as had been described. When Bandar told all this to the Crown Prince, Abdullah was surprised, particularly about the offer on Jerusalem. A few months later, Abdullah asked Clinton, who was visiting Saudi Arabia, whether Bandar's description of the offer was correct. Clinton confirmed Bandar's details, and said that the failure of these last negotiations had broken his heart. Later still, the Crown Prince told Bandar he was shocked that Arafat had wasted such an opportunity, and that he had lied to him about the American offer. Bandar told associates that it was an open secret within the Arab world that Arafat was not truthful. But Arafat had them trapped: they couldn't separate the cause from the man, because if you attacked the man you attacked the cause. "Clinton, the bastard, really tried his best," Bandar told me last week when we met at his house in McLean. "And Barak's position was so avant-garde that it was equal to Prime Minister Rabin"-Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated in November, 1995. "It broke my heart that Arafat did not take that offer."

Before the outcome of the 2000 election was settled, Bandar had asked George H. W. Bush to go pheasant shooting with him at an estate that he owns in England. It was to be a kind of Desert Storm reunion. Dick Cheney had accepted; so had former Secretary of State James Baker, the former national-security adviser Brent Scowcroft, and General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of the U.S. Central Command during the Gulf War. But when the shooting party arrived, on November 14th, Cheney had dropped out, as had Baker, who was in Florida managing the recount battle. A month later, when Al Gore conceded, Bandar felt that it was a victory not only for the Bush family but for Saudi Arabia. "Happy days are here again," one of his aides said, almost singing the words, when I saw him at the Saudi Embassy shortly after Bush's Inauguration.

In Saudi Arabia, great things were expected of George W. Bush. He was the son of the American with the most iconic status in Saudi Arabia, and the team that he had assembled vis-a-vis the Middle East was considered first-rate: Powell, Cheney, and Tenet, a Clinton Administration holdover who had Bandar's endorsement. There were people with access to Bush who had deep experience in the region: his father, Scowcroft, James Baker.

But as violence in the Middle East intensified and Barak blamed Arafat for the failure of the peace talks, Bandar began to worry. The Arab world was watching Al Jazeera, the satellite television network, which was constantly showing images of Israeli soldiers and suffering Palestinians. Bandar understood as well as anyone why Bush did not want to get involved. It was a mess, and Bush made it clear that he had no prestige to waste. Bandar was particularly angry with Arafat because if he publicly defended Barak's account it would make him sound like an apologist for Barak and Israel. "I was there. I was a witness. I cannot lie," he said privately.

Ariel Sharon was elected in February of 2001, and, according to a Saudi source, Arafat later said that Sharon had sent his son to say that Barak's deal was off the table; Sharon, however, could envision a process whereby the Palestinians might end up with forty-five per cent of the occupied territories, but not Jerusalem. Isn't that a great starting point? Arafat reportedly said. Bandar, when he heard that, was incredulous.

Yet he continued to press Bush and Powell to do something, even if they didn't trust Arafat. The issue was bigger than one man; it was roiling the Arab world. Bandar told Bush and Powell that in America he saw perhaps two minutes a day of network news about the region, "but when I go there I see five, six hours a day of it."

It did not help Bush in the Arab world that he seemed to place all the blame on Arafat. In May, Crown Prince Abdullah publicly declined an invitation to the White House. "We want them to look at the reality and to consider their conscience," he said to a reporter for the Financial Times. "Don't they see what is happening to Palestinian children, women, the elderly-the humiliation, the hunger?"

Bandar attributed some of the problems to a lack of knowledge by Condoleezza Rice, who was, after all, a Russian expert. Powell, he believed, was on his side, as was Tenet. He also believed that Vice-President Cheney, who, as the Secretary of Defense, had dealt extensively with the Saudis during the Persian Gulf War, would be a big help. But, as the months passed, Bandar and his aides kept hearing that Cheney and some senior Pentagon officials were saying that the Saudis were not seriously upset at the Administration's lack of involvement.

In August, the Crown Prince saw on television an Israeli soldier pushing an elderly Palestinian woman. When she fell, she grabbed the soldier's leg and he stepped on her. The Crown Prince, in a rage, called Bandar. "This is it. Those bastards!" he yelled, according to an account that Bandar has given associates. "Even women-they're stepping all over them." He ordered Bandar, who was in Aspen, to return to Washington and to deliver a message: Starting today, you go your way and we will go our way. From then on, the Saudis would look out for their own national interests. The high-ranking Saudi military delegation that had just arrived in Washington for meetings at the Pentagon was ordered to return home immediately.

The message represented a fundamental shift in Saudi policy, and Bandar left for Washington deeply worried. On August 27th, he met with Rice at her White House office. "This is the hardest message I've had to deliver between our two countries since I started working in this country, in 1983," Bandar began, according to official Saudi notes that were later confirmed by an Administration source. For the next several minutes, Bandar summarized relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia. "We were your friend when it was not fashionable to be your friend. We stood in the fifties and sixties with you in the region when nobody was." He continued, "The biggest challenge, of course, to the two of us was Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait." The Crown Prince, he said, was deeply disturbed by the "continued Israeli actions, horrible actions, as if Jewish blood is not equal to Palestinian"-in particular, the practice of punishing the families of people suspected of committing terrorist acts. "We wonder how the American people would have accepted the President of the United States ordering all the McVeigh family houses to be destroyed or burning their farms," he said, referring to the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. It seemed as if the United States had made a strategic decision to adopt Sharon's policy as American policy. "In light of all that, the Crown Prince feels that he cannot continue dealing with the United States," Bandar told Rice. "We feel that since you have taken such a decision, then we also are obliged to take our own decision."

Rice told Bandar that she was shocked by the message and would take it immediately to the

President. But she wanted Bandar to understand that the United States had not adopted a new strategic policy for the region.

Within thirty-six hours, Bandar was on his way to Riyadh with a conciliatory response from Bush. Nothing should ever break the relations between their two countries, Bush wrote to the Crown Prince in a two-page letter dated August 29th. "I am troubled and feel deeply the suffering of ordinary Palestinians in their day to day life and I want such tragedies and sufferings to end," Bush wrote. "I firmly believe that the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination and to live peacefully and securely in their own state in their own homeland." Not even Clinton had publicly supported a Palestinian state.

On September 7th, Bandar returned to Washington with a letter from Abdullah to Bush, and a meeting was hurriedly arranged in the family quarters at the White House. Bush was there, as were Cheney, Rice, and Powell. As Bandar was walking in, Powell cornered him. "What the fuck are you doing?" witnesses recall Powell asking. "You're putting the fear of God in everybody's hearts here. We've all come rushing here to hear this revelation that you bring from Saudi Arabia. You scared the shit out of everybody." Bandar replied, "I don't give a damn what you feel. We are scared ourselves."

In his letter, the Crown Prince said that he had taken immediate steps. He had got in touch with Arafat and had "obtained from him a clear promise to exert a hundred per cent effort as you have requested." (Bandar had also brought a letter from Arafat stating the same promise.) The Crown Prince said that he had sent his Foreign Minister and Bandar to meet separately with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, and had showed Bush's letter to them. "I wish to inform you that those Arab leaders find in your letter just what I did, the beginning of a bringing back of the peace process to the right path." He urged Bush to take charge of initiating the revival of the peace process. "The efforts exerted in the past by your predecessors were not in vain, but rather brought the parties closer," he said in closing his letter. "Today, we face a turning point that leads either to disaster, God forbid, or to peace. This historical turning point requires a historical leader who will prevent this disaster. I have great hope in you, Mr. President, that you will be that leader."

Bush agreed that he should make public his support for a Palestinian state, and the remainder of the meeting focused on how to announce it. Powell was scheduled to leave Monday for a meeting in Peru, and they made plans to regroup on Thursday, after he returned. Bandar continued to work on the proposals, and on Monday night, September 10th, he floated in the indoor pool at his house in McLean, contentedly smoking a cigar.

Bandar slept late on the morning of September 11th. He was walking across his bedroom when he glanced at one of the ten television screens he kept on and saw fire coming out of one of the World Trade Center towers. "The first thing that came to my mind was that I'm going next week to the U.N. I am going to change my hotel and I am going to go to one of those hotels where you can live on the third or second floor," he recalled. "King Hussein of Jordan, bless his soul, used to tell me, 'Bandar, take my advice. Always stay on the first floor.' I said, 'Why, Majesty?' and he said, 'This fire. Or somebody starts shooting you. You jump out the window you break a leg, but if you are forty feet . . .'" Then he saw the second plane coming. "I had the same feeling I had

when Rabin was assassinated," he said. "I almost had a heart attack. And the first thing that came to my mind was 'I hope it's not an Arab, because it would be war.' And I had the same feeling here. 'I hope they are not Arabs.'" When Tenet called the next night to tell him that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers appeared to have been Saudi nationals, Bandar recalled, "I felt the whole world collapse over my shoulders."

As the day wore on, Bandar watched the coverage. At one point, he saw Palestinian youths celebrating in the street. "I thought, My God, the whole impression this nation is going to have of us, the whole world, will be formed in the next two or three days." He saw a congressman warning, "We will remember those people."

Two days after the attacks, the President asked Bandar to come to the White House. Bush embraced him and escorted him to the Truman balcony. Bandar had a drink and the two men smoked cigars. Bandar was in a daze, still hoping that the news of Saudi participation would turn out to be a mistake. Al Qaeda operatives, after all, had travelled on false passports in the past, and so far the only identity that appeared certain was that of Mohammed Atta, the ringleader, who was an Egyptian. Until then, Bush had seemed to Bandar to be in his father's shadow; he took more of his personality from his mother—he shot from the hip. But this day there was no bluster. At one point, Bush told Bandar that if any Al Qaeda operatives were captured, "if we can't get them to cooperate, we'll hand them over to you." The clear implication was that the Saudis could do whatever they wanted to elicit information from suspects. A few days later, Bandar helped arrange to get bin Laden family members out of the United States, a move that was made under the supervision of the F.B.I. but caused public consternation.

On September 18th, Condoleezza Rice called Bandar to tell him that the President wanted to see him at the White House. Cheney and Rice were there when Bandar arrived; Bush's two dogs nudged people's legs, and Bush joked that he wanted to see a friendly face before his next meeting with Jacques Chirac, the President of France, who had been critical of him. ("Let him wait," Bush instructed at one point during the two-hour meeting, when an aide announced that Chirac had arrived.) Bandar advised Bush to be careful about his rhetoric; it was fine to put the fear of God in people but not to use words like "crusade," as he had two days earlier. Bush had visited a mosque the day before, taking off his shoes, and Saudi television had broadcast replays of the visit all day long.

On September 21st, Bandar returned to the White House, this time to meet with Bush and the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al Faisal. Saud, Princeton-educated and a bit stuffy, pledged Saudi support, but he warned Bush that the fight could take time. In the long term, Bush needed to do something about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Use this opportunity to do something great," Saud said. As Bandar recalled the conversation, "We said, 'Let's keep our eye on the ball on this, let's not let anybody distract us.'" He added, "It is always dangerous to leave the Middle East to our own, because we can manage to find something wrong that could blow everything up."

The Saudis were worried about terrorist strikes in their own country, but they wanted their American allies to trust them. In one important move, the Saudis began to give the Pakistanis their daily oil allotment—almost two hundred thousand barrels—at no charge, as an incentive to

cooperate with the Americans; they have continued to do so. As law-enforcement and intelligence agents travelled between Riyadh and C.I.A. headquarters, in Langley, Virginia, the Saudis let the C.I.A. know about telephone calls that they'd intercepted between key Al Qaeda operatives congratulating each other after September 11th, and about calls from bin Laden family members who had gone into hiding. The help was big and small, in Bandar's view. They passed along another offer of help from Libya's Qaddafi; they helped to trace a pre-9/11 phone conversation, between someone in Afghanistan and someone in Saudi Arabia, that eventually led to the arrest of thirty-five Al Qaeda suspects in Saudi Arabia.

None of this did much to stanch the anti-Saudi feeling in the United States. Commentators and politicians complained about Wahhabism's being taught in Saudi schools. Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz, the Minister of the Interior, gave an interview in an Arab newspaper in which he blamed the Jews for the terror attacks: "Who benefited from the events of 9/11? I think they"-the Zionists-"are behind these events." There were press stories that the Saudis were not being helpful enough, in terms of either military support or intelligence sharing. Saudi Arabia is "funding hatred," Senator Joseph Biden, who was then the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said. These attacks put the Saudis and Bandar in an even more delicate position: the ruling Saud family allied itself with Wahhabism's founder more than two centuries ago, and the partnership had been instrumental in keeping the royal family in power; Wahhabism also inspired Saudi support for terror organizations. "We said, 'You preach and I fight,' " Bandar told me last month, and added, "The reality is that we are the only government system where the leadership is more forward-looking than the public, and that is a big problem."

Bandar acknowledged the Saudi hijackers, but he called them loners and misfits. Bush, in a press conference on September 24, 2001, said that the Saudis had "been nothing but cooperative." A couple of months after the terrorist strikes, Tenet privately called Saudi cooperation "fantastic," and Dale Watson, who was then the F.B.I.'s chief of counterterrorism, told me that the Saudis were doing whatever they were asked to do.

Bandar believed that before September 11th Saudi Arabia had been at least as vigilant about Al Qaeda as the United States, and certainly more vigilant than Britain or Germany. I later asked Louis Freeh, the former F.B.I. director, whether Bandar was right in asserting that the Saudis were working hard to pursue bin Laden before September 11th. Freeh, who is now a senior vice-chairman at the credit-card company MBNA, in Delaware, said, "From where I sat and from what I knew . . . Al Qaeda was more a threat to them than to the U.S., particularly prior to East Africa"-the United States Embassy bombings in 1998-"because of bin Laden's earlier activities. His whole focus was on toppling the royal family and getting the U.S. forces out of Saudi Arabia. The notion that the Saudis pulled their punches is not consistent with anything I knew or saw there."

Privately, Bandar noted that, as far back as early 1998, the Saudis had alerted the United States to the prominent and dangerous role played by an Al Qaeda operative named Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri. Nashiri's arrest this past November made front-page news, and he was identified as the leader of Al Qaeda's operations in the Gulf; the Saudis participated in the arrest. The Saudis had asked the United States for help in capturing Nashiri in the winter of 1998, after they found three buried suitcases containing nine antitank Sagger missiles and identified him as the leader of Al

Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. (The missiles were apparently intended for use against the royal family.)

C.I.A. and F.B.I. sources confirmed that Bandar had asked the White House and the C.I.A. for help in capturing Nashiri, who had apparently fled to Yemen, and they acknowledged that his request was not treated aggressively until later, when Nashiri was identified as one of the strategists behind the East Africa Embassy bombings and the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, in the fall of 2000. "I'm not superstitious, but it sure is a bad omen," Bandar said, in October of 2001. "Every time we lose track of this guy, something bad happens."

In early November of 2001, Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, who was in Washington, told the Times that Bush's unwillingness to force a Middle East solution "makes a sane man go mad"-despite private views in Saudi Arabia about Arafat's untrustworthiness. In February, the Crown Prince publicly offered to normalize relations between the Arab states and Israel if Israel withdrew from all the occupied territories.

Bush, in a series of comments, seemed to vacillate between supporting Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist attacks as it saw fit and urging Israel to exercise restraint. In April, Bandar, in a speech at the University of Oklahoma, seemed to signal a growing disillusionment with the Bush Administration. "I'm proud, not ashamed, to be a friend of the United States," he said, and he added, "But I'm frustrated." A few days later, Bush called Sharon "a man of peace." On April 16th, the White House announced that Crown Prince Abdullah planned to visit Bush at his ranch in Crawford. The circumstances were not promising. Abdullah's opinion of Bush was increasingly unfavorable, and by this time Bush had begun to declare that one of his goals was "regime change" in Iraq. Saudi support was essential, but unless something was done about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Saudis could not oppose another Arab country, not even Iraq.

On April 24th, the eve of the visit, Bandar received a private briefing from one of the President's senior officials: Bush, he was told, was unaware of what was happening in the streets of the West Bank or Gaza. "This guy doesn't watch TV-he just doesn't know this stuff," the official said, adding that Bush's aides, many of whom were staunchly pro-Israel, shielded him. Bandar was in a hotel in Houston preparing Abdullah for his meeting with Bush the next morning. Bandar wanted Bush to see what Arabs saw daily on Al Jazeera, hoping that it would open his eyes, and so his aides were trying to get photographs. Eventually, they were able to find some, mostly pictures of dead Palestinian children-a five-year-old with a bullet wound to his head, a child cut in half. He did not want to show the most gruesome; the purpose was not to make Bush sick.

Bandar knew that if Bush was unaware of views within the Arab world, he couldn't understand the impact that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was having in the region. Already the trip was becoming something of a fiasco. On Abdullah's first day in Houston, the White House had faxed Bandar a draft of a proposed communique, to be released by the two leaders following their meeting, which seemed to place all the blame for the increase in violence on Arafat and the Palestinians. "This is ridiculous-this is unacceptable," Bandar said to an aide, and he picked up the phone to call Powell. The Secretary of State claimed that he hadn't seen the latest version, and had rejected previous drafts. The draft had come from Vice-President Cheney's office, the rationale being that Abdullah is the Vice-President of Saudi Arabia. Bandar faxed back his

rejection to the White House and warned that Cheney should not under any circumstances give a copy of it to the Crown Prince.

A meeting with Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in Houston hadn't gone well, either. Rumsfeld had spent most of the meeting giving the Crown Prince a lengthy presentation on how much more accurate the American weaponry used in Afghanistan was than that used in the Gulf War. The Crown Prince was also given a new draft of the proposed communique, one that left the impression that the discussion of the Middle East crisis was secondary to issues like the Saudi desire to join the World Trade Organization. The Crown Prince had expected that the communique was a chance to offer a bold agreement on a peace initiative. Do they think I'll be happy just because I came to the ranch? he asked. That I want to say we met and had fun?

Early the next morning, after the Crown Prince's plane arrived in Waco, Powell joined Abdullah, Saud, and Bandar for the drive to Crawford. Powell had heard discouraging reports about the meeting with Cheney and Rumsfeld, and it was clear that Abdullah was upset. Abdullah, speaking to Powell, stressed that he had put himself at great risk to meet with Bush. Arab friends, by phone, fax, and letter, were telling him not to go. He said that he intended to deliver a blunt message: that Bush had to get involved, and that he had to end the Israeli occupation-including the siege of Arafat in his compound.

With Bush were Cheney, Rice, Powell, and Andrew Card, the President's chief of staff. With the Crown Prince were Bandar, Rihab Massoud, the Embassy's charge d'affaires, and Saud. The Crown Prince said that he was disappointed by the proposed talking points; he repeatedly said that Bush had to do something to end the occupation. Abdullah emphasized the danger to the region; there was rioting in Bahrain, the most peaceful of countries. Egypt was in trouble, and so was Jordan-Jordan could go up in flames. But when the Crown Prince pressed him for the details of a plan to end the occupation, Bush and his advisers kept saying that they had told Sharon to get out of the territories.

Abdullah told Bush that he had no idea of the risk he had taken in coming to Crawford; he seemed to be deeply frustrated. "I will get on my aircraft and go home," witnesses recalled him saying. "I will tell people I have tried. I have delivered my message to the President and maybe you didn't understand . . . I have tried and you cannot do anything. . . . I cannot go on as if nothing has happened. I am going to leave and say I have failed, not you. I have failed by not convincing you, by not persuading you with clearer facts."

Bush replied that he didn't want the Crown Prince to fail. Powell stood up and pulled Bandar outside. Standing nose to nose on the porch, the two started to argue. "What the hell are you guys doing?" Powell demanded of Bandar, according to two Administration sources. "You came here and expected us to do it in the same day you're here? In three hours?" Bush, curious at the sight, joined them on the porch, listening to the exchange. He seemed surprised at how intense and emotional everyone was. Bandar said to Powell, "Well, we told you what we needed. We communicated two days ago, and we thought we'd hear something last night. We didn't hear anything. You've known this is what he needed."

The exchange moved back inside, and Powell pressed Abdullah to stay. "You can't stand that kind of failure. Neither can we, and, more important, the situation can't," Powell said to Abdullah, according to Administration sources. Bush, Powell said, needed time to try to do what Abdullah had asked. Finally, Abdullah announced that he would remain if Powell was serious about fixing the problem, and he and Bush resumed their discussion. But this time they would meet with only a translator, and discard the talking points, which seemed to make everyone nervous. Bandar, Saud, and Massoud left the room, with Cheney, Powell, Rice, and Card, and waited as the two leaders talked. Cheney, who was on crutches because he had injured a foot, hardly said a word. Once thought to be an ally, Cheney was increasingly perceived by the Saudis as insensitive to what was happening in the region. His silence intensified that feeling.

The meeting was scheduled to last twenty minutes, but Bush and Abdullah talked for two hours. At one point, the Crown Prince handed Bush the photographs of the dead Palestinian children. Do you think it's right? he asked. Bush appeared surprised by the photographs and his eyes seemed to well up. One person familiar with the conversation summarized Bush's comments: "I want peace. I don't want to see any people killed on both sides. I think God loves me. I think God loves the Palestinians. I think God loves the Israelis. We cannot allow this to continue." At one point, Bush told Abdullah that he believed Muslims and Israelis were all God's children and that God didn't want to see children from either side die. The meeting ended with both leaders promising to deliver the other side: Abdullah pledged to rein in Arafat and Bush to rein in Sharon.

Someone suggested a break for lunch. Before beginning to eat, Bush bowed his head and reached for Saud's hand. "Let us pray," he said. A look of panic came over the Crown Prince, who was unfamiliar with the Christian custom of saying grace before meals. "What is he doing?" he whispered to an aide sitting nearby. "What should I do?" Powell also looked stricken, as if he couldn't believe what Bush was saying in front of his Muslim guests.

Abdullah later told others that he had been impressed with the seriousness of Bush's religious convictions. Bush called Sharon, who ended the Israeli siege of Arafat's compound. Over the next several months, some progress was made, although it was eclipsed by more suicide bombings and new reprisals from Israel. In January, Bush privately assured the Crown Prince that he would re-start the peace process when the war in Iraq was over. Late last week, Bush announced his long-promised "road map" for peace in the region.

On August 6th, the Washington Post reported that a Rand Corporation analyst briefing a top Pentagon advisory board earlier that summer had described Saudi Arabia as an enemy of the United States. A week later, nearly three thousand relatives of the victims of the September 11th attacks filed a private lawsuit against members of the Saudi royal family, accusing them of having financial ties to Al Qaeda. Lawyers for the plaintiffs alleged that some of the financing for Al Qaeda had come from Saudi charitable organizations; among the defendants was Bandar's father, Prince Sultan, who oversees one of the largest charitable foundations in Saudi Arabia. (Last March, the Times reported that the Administration and the Saudis tried to close two branches of a Saudi charity suspected of aiding extremists under cover of supporting Islamic schools and orphanages. Branches in Bosnia and Somalia were shut down, but it wasn't clear whether the charity's activities actually stopped.)

These events, particularly the Pentagon briefing, caused an uproar in Saudi Arabia, even though Bush and Administration officials said that neither reflected the position of the American government. Bush invited Bandar to Crawford. At the end of last August, Bandar flew from Aspen to Texas and picked up his wife, Haifa, who was there with some of their children visiting their second-oldest son, a student at Baylor University, in Houston. The family went on to Crawford, where, after a while, Bush and Bandar broke off for a private meeting. Bush wanted Bandar to know that he was trying to send a message; he'd learned from his father the value of access to a President. To the Saudis, he was saying that he had invited Bandar to the same place where he had invited only three foreign leaders: Tony Blair, Vladimir Putin, and Crown Prince Abdullah. To the American public, he was saying that he was fed up with having to insist that Saudi Arabia was cooperating with America.

Bush also wanted it known that he was serious about Iraq. He asked Bandar what had happened with the Clinton Administration, and Bandar described how, in October of 1994, King Fahd had told Clinton that neither country could afford to have Saddam Hussein remain in power, from a military, political, or economic point of view. Fahd, Bandar said, suggested that Saudi Arabia and the United States spend as much on covert operations to get Saddam as they had in Afghanistan to oust the Soviets-about a billion dollars each. The Saudis, in fact, were willing to spend more. Fahd told Clinton that he had rounded up support for the plan from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and even Iran. They shook hands on it, Bandar told Bush, but nothing came of it. "For six years, we've been given the runaround," he said. "Therefore everybody here"-in Saudi Arabia-"adjusted to cover their rear ends."

Bandar told Bush that he and Turki bin Faisal, who was then the intelligence chief, had regularly called the National Security Council staff or the C.I.A. director, John Deutch, to ask about progress. Deutch, he said, had at one point suggested that perhaps the two sides should contribute twenty million dollars each-such a small sum that it began to raise questions in Bandar's mind about America's seriousness. When Tenet replaced Deutch and Berger took over as national-security adviser, Bandar continued to press both men on the covert plan. Eventually, Bandar told Bush, "we became convinced the Americans had no intention to remove Saddam and they were happy with the status quo." A spokesman for the Clinton White House said, "It is true that we were working with the Saudis. It is not true that we were not taking this seriously. It did not succeed." The spokesman, who asked Clinton a series of questions that I had submitted to him, said that he could not answer any questions about the agreement between Fahd and Clinton: "This is just one piece I'm not going to get into in any great detail because it's very classified kind of stuff."

Bush asked Bandar to tell him what Saddam was like. Bandar was certain that Saddam would not forgive or forget his defeat in the Gulf War, and that any talk of compromise or containment was futile. It was his personal opinion, not his government's, but he believed that either Saddam would kill all those associated with the Gulf War or they would have to kill him. But, most important, Saddam knew that the only way to stay alive was to stay in power. Bush wondered how he stayed in power after killing so many people; he said he couldn't understand "how those dumb son-in-laws" went back-referring to Saddam's in-laws, who several years ago returned from Jordan, after being promised safe passage, and were executed. Bandar replied that Saddam

stayed in power because he was ruthless, and he also told Bush that even though many European and Arab countries were saying publicly that they opposed a military effort to topple Saddam, they were saying something else in private. After the meeting, the White House released a photograph of Bush sitting in a chair and Bandar perched on the arm of another, towering over him. The two men seem to be talking intimately and intensely, like two old friends. In Saudi Arabia, at least, the photograph carried great symbolic value.

In the months since the meeting in Crawford, Bandar's chief focus has been on what appears to be an almost certain war with Iraq. At the end of January, Bandar and Saud met with Colin Powell on an airport runway in Zurich to report on meetings with Pervez Musharaff, and on what some Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, were doing to encourage Saddam to go into exile. (The Saudis, a source told me last week, were using other means to win support for the United States: they were about to freeze a pending eight-hundred-million-dollar contract to buy tanks from the French.) In his travels, Bandar, who has always prided himself on his realism, delivered a similar message: War was coming. Nothing could be done to stop it. Their national interests coincided with those of the United States. "It's a very simple equation" if you live in the region, Bandar told me. "If you cannot stop it, then it is almost an abdication of responsibility for you not to say, 'O.K., I don't want the war, but the war is going to happen. What is it that I can do to maximize my national interest? What is it that I need to do to have the day after more positive than now?' "

This article was originally published in *The New Yorker* on March 24, 2003.
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