

HOT AND COLD RUNNING BANDAR

Yesterday, just weeks after the time Al Arabiya announced Prince Bandar bin Sultan would resume his duties as head of Saudi intelligence (and therefore the mastermind of the Saudi-backed effort to oust Bashar al-Assad), Bandar was replaced by a little-known deputy.

He had resumed his position in March, just two days before the President visited the Kingdom.

Prince Bandar bin Sultan is on his way back to Riyadh where he will resume his tasks as head of Saudi Intelligence, reported news portal NOW Lebanon.

An informed Saudi source confirmed the report to Al Arabiya News.

“This is without doubt bad news for Tehran, Damascus and Hezbollah, particularly that anti-Saudi media has been propagating false information for the past two months that Prince Bandar’s absence has been due to his dismissal and due to a Saudi decision to back away from its policies regarding the regional conflict,” said the source in Riyadh.

The source confirms that Prince Bandar has actually been away due to medical reasons, however, he has resumed his activities this week from the Moroccan city of Marrakesh; where he has been recovering and where he has met with former Lebanese PM Saad Hariri and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed.

But today he’s out.

Saudi Arabia’s intelligence chief Prince Bandar bin Sultan has been relieved of his post at his request, the official

Saudi Press Agency reported Tuesday.

The royal decree announcing that Prince Bandar was stepping down as president of General Intelligence gave no reasons for the move. He has been replaced by General Yousef Al Idrissi, the decree said.

I'm not sure anyone knows what these tea leaves mean. It may be that the "shoulder" injury Bandar had been treated for remains a serious health issue. It may be that – as one piece suggested – he retains some power here and has not ceded it back to Mohammed bin Nayef, who had taken over before Bandar's return in March. It may be that this and King Abdullah's designation of Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz as second in succession were done to time with Obama's visit, to signal that America's more favored successor, Mohammed bin Nayef, was not going to take over any time soon.

But it also comes among two other developments that may be related. First, since about the beginning of the year and increasingly in recent weeks, the Saudis are actually cracking down on terrorism, both real – including those who went to fight in Syria – and imagined. Perhaps the former, too, was a show for the US. But it did seem to reflect some concerns that Saudi efforts in Syria were increasing security concerns for the Kingdom (as well as other countries in the region and not).

Perhaps most interesting, however, is that the same day that Bandar got "sacked" videos started showing opposition figures in Syria with US made anti-tank missiles, which is the kind of thing Bandar has decades of experience arranging. We'll see whether those disappear like Bandar or represent a new escalation of efforts to oust Assad.