



Israel is aiding an exiled Arab sheikh who is vying to seize control of a strategically important Gulf emirate only 40 miles from Iran.

The Israeli ambassador to London, Ron Prosor, has met Sheikh Khalid bin Saqr al-Qasimi, the exiled crown prince of Ras al-Khaimah (RAK), who asked him to help with his campaign to oust the leadership of the northernmost state in the United Arab Emirates.

The meeting took place in London in March and has been followed by phone calls and wider assistance and advice, according to records of the relationship seen by the Guardian. Khalid, who has been based in London and has hired a solicitor from Ickenham as his agent, is bidding to replace his ailing father, Sheikh Saqr, and half brother, Sheikh Saud, to take control of RAK.

Israel's involvement in what would be a bloodless coup in one of the most sensitive regions in the world, would be "extremely uncomfortable", according to Dr Christopher Davidson, an expert on the politics of the UAE at Durham University.

Khalid, who was sent into exile in 2003, claims RAK is now acting as a trafficking hub for nuclear arms parts to Iran and has spent more than £4m on an international public relations and lobbying campaign to persuade American politicians and the pro-Israel lobby in the US that it would be safer if he were in charge.

The alliance with Israel is the latest twist in the already extraordinary saga of Khalid's bid to return to power. In June the Guardian revealed that his fighting fund was being channelled through Peter Cathcart, a 59-year-old miniature steam railway enthusiast and parish council chairman who runs a family firm of solicitors in Ickenham, west London.

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