

WHICH CAME FIRST: THE RADICALIZATION, THE ARMED JIHADISTS, OR THE MONARCHS SUPPORTING “DEMOCRACY”?

There have been a series of reports on Syria that culminate in today's report that most of the arms being shipped to Syria have gone to jihadists.

Most of the arms shipped at the behest of Saudi Arabia and Qatar to supply Syrian rebel groups fighting the government of Bashar al-Assad are going to hard-line Islamic jihadists, and not the more secular opposition groups that the West wants to bolster, according to American officials and Middle Eastern diplomats.

There were the reports of a different approach adopted by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, with the former preferring to arm Islamists and the latter showing more concern about the consequences.

Another growing problem is a lack of co-ordination between Qatar and the Saudis – the likely subject of Wednesday's talks in Doha between the Emir and the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar. King Abdullah is said to be growing impatient with the difficulties of the Syrian crisis. According to Syrian opposition activists, the Saudis now sponsor only rebel groups which are at odds with those backed by Qatar and Turkey, which are often linked to the Muslim Brotherhood.

"The Qataris are much more proactive than the Saudis," said one well-placed Arab source. "The Saudis are not interested in democracy, they just want to be rid of Bashar. They would be happy with a Yemeni solution that gets rid of the president and leaves the regime intact."

Intelligence chiefs from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and France reportedly met in Turkey in early September along with the CIA director general, David Petraeus. But they apparently failed to reach agreement on a co-ordinated strategy.

US officials say the opaque nature of the opposition and the creeping presence of foreign jihadis are behind their pressure on Riyadh and Doha. "They have both been given a yellow light by the Americans," said a Lebanese minister aligned to the Future movement. "The Saudis see yellow as yellow, but the Qataris have seen it as green."

And rebels are now blaming the delay in receiving arms on their own radicalization.

Majed al-Muhammad, the commander of a Syrian antigovernment fighting group, slammed his hand on his desk. "Doesn't America have satellites?" he asked, almost shouting. "Can't it see what is happening?"

A retired Syrian Army medic, Mr. Muhammad had reached the rank of sergeant major in the military he now fights against. He said he had never been a member of a party, and loathed jihadists and terrorists.

But he offered a warning to the West now commonly heard among fighters seeking the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad: The Syrian people are being

radicalized by a combination of a grinding conflict and their belief that they have been abandoned by a watching world.

If the West continues to turn its back on Syria's suffering, he said, Syrians will turn their backs in return, and this may imperil Western interests and security at one of the crossroads of the Middle East.

I suspect—in addition to reporting on this classified intelligence so Mitt can use it in Tuesday's debate (Sanger explicitly invokes the debate)—what we're seeing is some preliminary blame-casting for blowback, even as the problems with arming loosely vetted militias becomes apparent in Libya.

Who could have imagined that asking a bunch of conservative monarchs to arm rebels to overthrow an Iranian ally would not result in the flowering of democracy?

All that said, because the blame here is going to be significant, I'm not entirely convinced by Saudi claims they've bowed to US caution on arms.