

DID CHUCK HAGEL CUT OFF POOR BANDAR?

I'm working on a longer post on how Saudi King Abdullah took all his toys and went home because we wouldn't start an illegal war at his behest.

But for the moment, I want to look at a passage from this article reporting a Bandar bin Sultan tantrum.

Diplomats and officials familiar with events recounted two previously undisclosed episodes during the buildup to the aborted Western strike on Syria that allegedly further unsettled the Saudi-U.S. relationship.

In the run-up to the expected U.S. strikes, Saudi leaders asked for detailed U.S. plans for posting Navy ships to guard the Saudi oil center, the Eastern Province, during any strike on Syria, an official familiar with that discussion said. The Saudis were surprised when the Americans told them U.S. ships wouldn't be able to fully protect the oil region, the official said.

Disappointed, the Saudis told the U.S. that they were open to alternatives to their long-standing defense partnership, emphasizing that they would look for good weapons at good prices, whatever the source, the official said.

In the second episode, one Western diplomat described Saudi Arabia as eager to be a military partner in what was to have been the U.S.-led military strikes on Syria. As part of that, the Saudis asked to be given the list of military targets for the proposed strikes. The Saudis indicated they never got the information, the diplomat said. The Pentagon declined to comment.

“The Saudis are very upset. They don’t know where the Americans want to go,” said a senior European diplomat not in Riyadh.

So, in the second anecdote, we have a European diplomat revealing that “the Pentagon” refused to share targeting information about our planned strikes in Syria. It’s a smart decision, mind you, but I wonder whether something specific precipitated that, particularly given the allegations Bandar was engaging in disinformation and worse. Withholding such information from him, for example, would have prevented him from ensuring a few bombing runs led to further involvement.

Then there’s the first incident, in which the Saudis were shocked that the US hadn’t included protecting its Eastern Province in any war plan for Syria. Again, it’s a lot easier to sow a full-blown war in Syria if you know you’re protected from Syria’s sponsors at home.

But I do think Saudi Arabia’s oil industry would have been the most logical counterrattack for Syria and its allies, though probably using hacks rather than bombs.

Moreover, this gets to the expectations of the Technical Cooperation Agreement, in which the Saudis keep funneling us dollars and we protect its most vulnerable parts. Certainly, the Saudi threat to bring its weapons dollars elsewhere sure seems like a threat to discontinue it.

Still, this, too, was partly about sharing intelligence.

Has someone decided that the Saudis have been misusing the intelligence we’ve shared with them?