AFTER REPORTEDLY BEING OFFERED SAUDI WEAPONS SALES, FRANCE TRIES TO BLOW UP IRAN DEAL

Several weeks after this WSJ article describing a staged Bandar bin Sultan tantrum about US actions, it was revealed the "Western diplomat" involved was a representative of France.

> Diplomats here said Prince Bandar, who is leading the kingdom's efforts to fund, train and arm rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, **invited a Western diplomat to the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah over the weekend to voice Riyadh's frustration** with the Obama administration and its regional policies, including the decision not to bomb Syria in response to its alleged use of chemical weapons in August.
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> "This was a message for the U.S., not the U.N.," Prince Bandar was quoted by diplomats as specifying of Saudi Arabia's decision to walk away from the Security Council membership.
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> [snip]
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> However, the diplomats said, Prince Bandar told them he intends to roll back a partnership with the U.S. in which the Central Intelligence Agency and other nations' security bodies have covertly helped train Syrian rebels to fight Mr. Assad, Prince **Bandar said, according to the diplomats. Saudi Arabia would work with other allies instead in that effort, including Jordan and France**, the prince was quoted as saying.
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> [snip]

> 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.
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> **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**.
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> 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. [my emphasis]

The subtext here is clear: Bandar invited the French representative to Riyadh not just to whine about the US, but also to discuss weapons sales.

And now French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius is scuttling an Iran nuke deal because it is a "suckers deal." (See also Laura Rozen's take, as well as her live tweeting the comings and goings at @LRozen.)

Oh, by the way. François Hollande is also due to visit Israel in a week.

It's fairly clear what's going on. Saudi Arabia has to forestall an Iran deal, because once that happens the Iran will be in a position to challenge the Saudi position as a swing producer

(particularly if you assume Iran and Shia-led Iraq might act in concert).

So France will make an effort to thwart any deal. And if talks fail, they'll get a big chunk of Saudi Arabia's considerable weapons spending, at a time when the Saudis will probably be even further ramping up their purchases.

France, it seems, aspires to be the European participant in the growing Saudi-Israeli power block.