

BANDAR'S HOT AND COLD RUNNING JIHADIS

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In my questioning of the Administration's case on Syria, I have focused on holes within their own story – inconsistent numbers, claims about chain-of-command even while boasting of a hundred defections, false assurances about the reliability of the rebels. Note, too, Jim's catch about the timing of a rebel advance.

All the while I've been reading the several strands of stories alleging that rebel-tied people, not Assad, caused the attack. There's the story that hacked emails show a recently retired American Colonel assuring his wife that the dead Syrian kids were just for show. There's a new letter from Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (who warned about the Iraq WMD) warning that Syria is a trap.

I'm not confident yet I buy these stories – and besides, there's plenty of evidence that Vladimir Putin is waging as heavy a propaganda battle as the US government, so it could well be Russian propaganda.

But given all this, there's one more item that deserves far more attention. Back in early August, I noted a Reuters report of a meeting between Bandar bin Sultan and Putin, in which Bandar offered Putin a lot of things he couldn't deliver so long as Putin would give up on supporting Bashar al-Assad.

The day of the CW attack, what is clearly Putin's version of the story got published. In addition to it depicting Bandar basically concluding (at the end of July) that "there is no escape from the military option" in Syria, it also alleged that Bandar claimed he could shut down jihadist influence in Syria and suggested he could prevent Chechen terrorists from

attacking the Sochi Olympics. Or not, depending on whether Putin cooperated.

Bandar told Putin, "There are many common values and goals that bring us together, most notably the fight against terrorism and extremism all over the world. Russia, the US, the EU and the Saudis agree on promoting and consolidating international peace and security. The terrorist threat is growing in light of the phenomena spawned by the Arab Spring. We have lost some regimes. And what we got in return were terrorist experiences, as evidenced by the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the extremist groups in Libya. ... As an example, **I can give you a guarantee to protect the Winter Olympics in the city of Sochi on the Black Sea next year. The Chechen groups that threaten the security of the games are controlled by us, and they will not move in the Syrian territory's direction without coordinating with us. These groups do not scare us. We use them in the face of the Syrian regime but they will have no role or influence in Syria's political future.**"

Putin thanked King Abdullah for his greetings and Bandar for his exposition, but then he said to Bandar, "We know that you have supported the Chechen terrorist groups for a decade. And that support, which you have frankly talked about just now, is completely incompatible with the common objectives of fighting global terrorism that you mentioned. We are interested in developing friendly relations according to clear and strong principles."

Again, this is clearly Putin's version of the meeting. We should assume it is at least partly propaganda.

However, the allegation that Bandar either implicitly or explicitly threatened the Olympics does very closely resemble a threat Bandar is documented to have made in the past.

Back in 2004, the British Serious Fraud Office started to investigate the Al-Yamamah arms deal under Maggie Thatcher, in which BAE would bribe members of the Saudi royal family to sell arms (as a special side deal, the bribes became a slush fund to run covert ops). In 2005, BAE started pressuring SFO to drop the investigation in the public interest, at first citing the business BAE would lose if SFO continued the investigation. Then in December 2006, Bandar flew to Britain and threatened Tony Blair that the Saudis would stop counterterrorism cooperation unless SFO dropped the investigation. Within weeks, SFO dropped the investigation.

That threat is documented this way in the paperwork describing the efforts to drop the investigation.

Similarly [REDACTION] approach to [REDACTION] via the [REDACTION] appears to have been confined to the effect on the Typhoon and Al Yamamah contract. [REDACTION] raises the prospect that Saudi co-operation on counter terrorism and the relationship on Iraq and the wider Middle East will suffer. The Cabinet Secretary has raised the possibility of harm to intelligence gathering, [REDACTION] and to multinational initiative to try to resolve the Israel/Palestine conflict concluding that "if the Saudis are already starting to take such steps in relation to the Typhoon programme, then we must anticipate that they could follow though (sic) [REDACTION] in relation to counter terrorism and the bi-lateral relationship."

But subsequent reporting of the meeting (based

an investigation of SF0's decision described the threats as even more explicit predictions of a repeat of the 7/7 Tube attack.

Saudi Arabia's rulers threatened to make it easier for terrorists to attack London unless corruption investigations into their arms deals were halted, according to court documents revealed yesterday.

Previously secret files describe how investigators were told they faced "another 7/7" and the loss of "British lives on British streets" if they pressed on with their inquiries and the Saudis carried out their threat to cut off intelligence.

The threat – at least as portrayed – is about withdrawing intelligence and in doing so ensuring the Brits get attacked. It's not – as alleged in the Putin meeting – about controlling terrorists. And maybe that's what Bandar really threatened Putin with, that he would stop sharing intelligence leading up to the Olympics.

Still, the BAE background makes it clear that Bandar does and has made such threats in the past. Which lends credence to the claim that he made some kind of similar threat here.