

# CIA “COMMAND AND CONTROL” IN SYRIA

Yesterday, in a story describing the state of affairs following the suicide bomb that took out key members of Bashar al Assad’s national security team, David Ignatius described CIA’s (and Israel’s) involvement in Syria this way:

The CIA has been working with the Syrian opposition for several weeks under a non-lethal directive that allows the United States to evaluate groups and assist them with command and control. Scores of Israeli intelligence officers are also operating along Syria’s border, though they are keeping a low profile.

Even before I read Ignatius’ piece, I wondered if we had shared intelligence with the rebels, helping them to decimate Assad’s team so effectively. Certainly, intelligence sharing could be included under non-lethal activities.

And now, Middle Eastern sources are reporting this RUMINT.

Reports in the Arab-language press indicate the head of Iran’s covert foreign operations Quds force was killed in Wednesday’s bombing in Damascus. Al-Quds Force’s long-elusive commander, Maj. Gen. Qassem Suleimani, is reported to have made several trips to Damascua to meet with Assad and his top commanders since January of this year. Iran has made no bones about having bolstered Assad’s embattled regime with members of its own elite Revolutionary Guard, but the death of Suleimani would be a direct blow to Tehran.

Suleimani, who masterminded al-Quds Force operations in Iraq and covert activities throughout the Persian Gulf and Lebanon, is a key figure in Iranian

policymaking, particularly in security matters.

A combat veteran of Iran's 1980-88 war with Iraq, Suleimani took command of the al-Quds Force in the late 1990s and has become a powerful figure in the upper echelons of the Tehran regime.

His death in Wednesday's bombing could indicate Syria's rebels have covert support from Western nations in their anti-Assad campaign.

Well now, that would be rather remarkable "luck," wouldn't it? Those feisty Islamist-tied rebels taking out Assad's national security team and our enemy, all in one terrorist attack?

Additionally, Syrian rebels have seized the border crossing points between Syrian and Iraq, another pressing issue Ignatius rather presciently raised yesterday.

The main transit routes into Syria come from the four points of the compass – Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The two key axes, in terms of Western assistance, are Turkey and Jordan, both close allies of the United States. The two potential flash points for spreading the sectarian fighting are Lebanon and Iraq, both of which have substantial Shiite militias allied with Iran, which backs Assad.

It all seems to be falling into place for the Islamist backed rebels, huh?

Meanwhile, in probably but not definitely unrelated news, King Abdullah just named Bandar bin Sultan to head Saudi Arabia's intelligence service.

I wonder. Is the War on Terror still operative? Or has CIA been swapping prepositions of late?

Update: Wrong! Bandar's appointment is totally

related to Syria. He was appointed because he's the guy who partnered with us the last time (save Libya) we used Islamists to clandestinely overthrow a country.

For Saudis and Westerners who remember Prince Bandar as a driving force rallying international support and procuring weapons for Muslim fighters seeking to push Soviet forces from Afghanistan in the 1980s, the appointment was a sign that the Saudis might play a more influential role as uprisings that may remake the Arab world, especially in Syria.

"In these very hectic moments for Saudi foreign policy...we need Bandar bin Sultan," said Abdullah al-Shammri, a political analyst. "He's a volcano, and we need a volcano at this moment."

Mr. al-Shammri cited what he called Prince Bandar's "special relationship" with American officials. He also mentioned parallels between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia working together in the 1980s against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and current circumstances in Syria, where the U.S., Saudi Arabia and others are trying to overcome Russian objections to tougher action against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime.