

THE JORDANIAN ARMS THEFT STORY

The NYT has a blockbuster story reporting that Jordanian officers have been stealing weapons “shipped into Jordan” by CIA, and selling them on the black market. Some of these weapons were used to kill two American contractors at a training facility in November.

Weapons shipped into Jordan by the Central Intelligence Agency and Saudi Arabia intended for Syrian rebels have been systematically stolen by Jordanian intelligence operatives and sold to arms merchants on the black market, according to American and Jordanian officials.

Some of the stolen weapons were used in a shooting in November that killed two Americans and three others at a police training facility in Amman, F.B.I. officials believe after months of investigating the attack, according to people familiar with the investigation.

The existence of the weapons theft, which ended only months ago after complaints by the American and Saudi governments, is being reported for the first time after a joint investigation by The New York Times and Al Jazeera.

I’m still trying to figure out what to make of this story, so for the moment, I just want to unpack it.

First, consider the players. The story is sourced to US and Jordanian “officials,” (a term which can sometimes mean contractors or Members of Congress). The CIA and FBI both refused to comment for the story; the State Department and Jordan’s press people both gave fluff statements.

The story is a joint project – between Qatar’s

media outlet, Al-Jazeera (here's their link to the story), and the "official press" of the US, the NYT. So Americans, Jordanians, and Qataris were involved in this story.

But no Saudis, in spite of the fact that the story reports that Saudis apparently complained some months ago.

The story seems to suggest that after a Jordanian police official who had just been fired for reasons not yet made public and presumably had his official weapon confiscated went and got this one – it's not clear whether he purchased it or got it some other way – and killed five (including two American DynCorp contractors) and injured seven others. As part of the FBI investigation, the story suggests, they traced the serial number of the Kalashnikov the killer used to a shipment directly tied to the CIA.

American and Jordanian officials said the investigators believed that the weapons that a Jordanian police captain, Anwar Abu Zaid, used to gun down two Jordanians, two American contractors and one South African had originally arrived in Jordan intended for the Syrian rebel-training programme.

The officials said this finding had come from tracing the serial numbers of the weapons.

Apparently parallel to that investigation, Jordanians have had rumors of the theft for some time.

Word that the weapons intended for the rebels were being bought and sold on the black market leaked into Jordan government circles last year, when arms dealers began bragging to their customers that they had large stocks of US- and Saudi-provided weapons.

Jordanian intelligence operatives

monitoring the arms market – operatives not involved in the weapons-diversion scheme – began sending reports to headquarters about a proliferation of weapons in the market and of the boasts of the arms dealers.

Here's the thing. The article says the theft and sale of the arms has led to a flood of new weapons on the black market.

The theft and resale of the arms – including Kalashnikov assault rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades – have led to a flood of new weapons available on the black arms market.

Investigators do not know what became of most of them, but a disparate collection of groups, including criminal networks and rural Jordanian tribes, use the arms bazaars to build their arsenals.

Perhaps that's true within Jordan. But the weapons came *from the black market* in the first place – from the Balkans and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the story claims. If these weapons did come from Eastern Europe, what has really happened is that the US and Saudis have *transported* weapons to Jordan, only to have them appear back on the black market there, with some cash in the pockets of some Jordanian officers.

And after the Americans and Saudis complained, there was a crack down with no real consequences for those involved.

Jordanian officials who described the operation said it had been run by a group of GID logistics officers with direct access to the weapons once they reached Jordan. The officers regularly siphoned truckloads of the weapons from the stocks, before delivering the rest of the weapons to designated drop-off points.

Then the officers sold the weapons at several large arms markets in Jordan.

[snip]

It is unclear whether the current head of the GID, General Faisal al-Shoubaki, had knowledge of the theft of the CIA and Saudi weapons. But several Jordanian intelligence officials said senior officers inside the service had knowledge of the weapons scheme and provided cover for the lower-ranking officers.

[snip]

After the Americans and Saudis complained about the theft, investigators at the GID arrested several dozen officers involved in the scheme, among them a lieutenant colonel running the operation. They were ultimately released from detention and fired from the service, but were allowed to keep their pensions and money they gained from the scheme, according to Jordanian officials.

One more point: the story notes that Obama authorized this program, which the story reveals is called Timber Sycamore, in 2013. It says it is run by the US and several Arab intelligence programs, but neglects to mention Qatar is a key player.

Now, it is true, as far as we know, that official covert CIA involvement started in 2013. But the program dates back earlier, to 2011, with the CIA watching the Saudis and Qataris funnel weapons from Libya to Syria in conjunction with the Benghazi attack. The US got more involved in 2013, in part, to try to put some order to the program. You know: to ensure that weapons got to the people we wanted them to get to?

And here we learn – because a Jordanian

officer gone back shot up the training program
one day – that at least some of those weapons
weren't actually going where they were supposed
to?

Update: Moon of Alabama offers his take.