

ATTEMPTED COUP IN QATAR? UPDATED: PROBABLY NOT

Both the Iranian Fars News Agency and Pakistan's The News Tribe are reporting that a coup attempt in Qatar has failed. The post by The News Tribe cites Al Arabiya TV, but nothing appears on Al Arabiya's English website as of this writing, nor is there anything on the story at the English version of Al Jazeera, which is based in Qatar.

From Fars:

Qatar is experiencing critical conditions after it was the scene of a coup attempt against Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, sources close to the country's royal family revealed on Tuesday.

Informed sources close to the royal family in Qatar told FNA that a failed coup d'état has happened in Qatar but the Qatari officials have sought hard to keep it away from the media and the public, given the growingly fragile conditions in the country and the instability in a number of regional Arab states.

/snip/

The limited news reports released by some local and Arab media earlier this week said that the Qatari Emir succeeded over the past weekend to foil a coup attempt against him. They added some 30 senior army officers were detained while some others were put under house arrest.

The News Tribe starts out with pretty much the same information as Fars:

According to Al Arabiya TV, a number of

high-ranking military officers rose against the Qatari Emir, triggering fierce clashes between some 30 military officers and US-backed royal guards outside the Emir's palace, the report said on Tuesday.

The coup was foiled following the arrest of the officers involved in the effort.

But they have much more:

American helicopters have reportedly transferred the Qatari Emir and his wife to an unknown location.

Meanwhile, informed Kuwaiti sources said that mediated recent disputes between Saudi Arabia and Qatar have unveiled a new series of disagreements between the officials of the two Persian Gulf states.

The revelation of Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani's secret phone conversation on the internet intensified internal conflicts between the two Arab states.

In a telephone conversation, the Qatari premier envisioned a definite overthrow of the Saudi regime, saying Qatar will step in the al-Qatif and al-Sharqiya regions one day and Saudi Arabia will be disintegrated.

The US, of course, relies very heavily on Qatar. From the Congressional Research Service (pdf) in May of 2011:

Qatar, a small peninsular country in the Persian Gulf, emerged as a partner of the United States in the mid-1990s and currently serves as host to major U.S. military facilities. Qatar holds the third largest proven natural gas reserves in the world, and its small population enjoys the world's highest

per capita income. The emir of Qatar, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, has managed a course of major economic growth and very limited political liberalization since replacing his father in a bloodless palace coup in 1995. The emir has undertaken several projects to capitalize on Qatar's hydrocarbon resources, improve educational opportunities for Qatari citizens, and pursue economic diversification. As part of Qatar's liberalization experiment, the Qatari monarchy founded Al Jazeera, the first all-news Arabic language satellite television network, in 1995. The network has proven influential and controversial since its establishment, including during recent unrest in the Arab world. In an April 2003 referendum, Qatari voters approved a new constitution that officially granted women the right to vote and run for national office. Elections have been delayed for a national Advisory Council established by the new constitution, and no target date has been set. Central Municipal Council elections are planned for May 2011.

Following joint military operations during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Qatar and the United States concluded a Defense Cooperation Agreement that has been subsequently expanded. In April 2003, the U.S. Combat Air Operations Center for the Middle East moved from Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia to Qatar's Al Udeid airbase south of Doha, the Qatari capital. Al Udeid and other facilities in Qatar serve as logistics, command, and basing hubs for the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of operations, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In spite of serving as the host to a large U.S. military presence and supporting U.S. regional

initiatives, Qatar has remained mostly secure from terrorist attacks. Terrorist statements indicate that energy infrastructure and U.S. military facilities in Qatar remain potential targets. U.S. officials have described Qatar's counterterrorism cooperation since 9/11 as significant; however, some observers have raised questions about possible support for Al Qaeda by some Qatari citizens, including members of Qatar's large ruling family.

Oh, and that "bloodless palace coup in 1995"? It was US-backed. It will be worth monitoring where the Emir turns up and whether/when he returns to Qatar. The simmering dispute between Qatar and the Saudis will also bear watching, as the US would be put into a very tough position if it became necessary to choose sides in that dispute.

Update: Iran's PressTV notes Al Arabiya removed the report from its website and that today's report may have been an erroneous repeat of an attempt from 2011:

In a report not confirmed by independent sources, Al-Arabiya alleged that a number of high-ranking military officers have risen against the regime of Qatari King Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani.

According to the Saudi news channel, the coup was foiled following the arrest of the officers involved in the effort, and American helicopters transferred the Qatari Emir and his wife to an unknown location.

The Al-Arabiya report was however removed from the channel's website after the story was published.

Press TV contacted Al-Arabiya and Qatari-owned Al-Jazeera for comment, but did not receive a clear response.

There is speculation that Al Arabiya might have mistakenly reported the news of a similar coup attempt in 2011.