

PUTIN'S GAME

'I declare it's marked out just like a large chessboard!' Alice said at last. 'There ought to be some men moving about somewhere—and so there are!' she added in a tone of delight, and her heart began to beat quick with excitement as she went on. 'It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—all over the world—if this is the world at all, you know. Oh, what fun it is!'

As you may have heard, the Russians rather ostentatiously outed an alleged American spy, Ryan Fogle, yesterday. Before I talk about that, I wanted to make sure folks had Garry Kasparov's op-ed in the WSJ from the other day. Among other questions about whether we really want to be partnering closely with Vladimir Putin, Kasparov notes how selective Putin's attentiveness to terrorism can be.

Terror would seem to be a more likely area for U.S.-Russian collaboration, especially regarding the virulent brand of Islamist extremism that has been bubbling over in Russia's southwestern Caucasus region since the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet the Kremlin's cooperation on the Islamist threat has been remarkably selective.

Soon after the suspects' names in the Boston bombing became known, the Russian security services announced that they had warned the FBI about the elder Tsarnaev, Tamerlan, in 2011. But what about during and after Tamerlan's visit to Russia's North Caucasus in 2012? That's when he reportedly was indoctrinated and trained by radicals in Dagestan.

Why were there no communications in 2012 from the FSB (the successor of the KGB)

about a suspected radical, an American no less, training in the hottest of Caucasus terrorist hotbeds and then returning to the U. S.? It is beyond belief that the extensive police state that monitors every utterance of the Russian opposition could lose track of an American associating with terrorists.

Tamerlan reportedly met with Makhmud Mansur Nidal, a known terror recruiter, and William Plotkin, a Russian-Canadian jihadist. Both men were killed in Dagestan by the Russian military just days before Tamerlan left Russia for the U.S. If no intelligence was sent from Moscow to Washington, all this talk of FSB cooperation cannot be taken seriously.

This would not be the first time Russian security forces seemed strangely impotent in the face of an impending terror attack. In the Nord-Ost theater siege by Islamist Chechens in 2002 and the Beslan school hostage attack by Chechen and other Islamist radicals in 2004, it later came to light that there were FSB informants in both terror groups—yet the attacks went ahead unimpeded. Beslan was quickly used by Mr. Putin to justify shredding the last vestiges of Russian democracy by eliminating the election of regional governors.

It's not just Kasparov doubting Putin's cooperation on the Boston Marathon investigation.

House Intelligence Chair Mike Rogers complained about it back on April 26.

"The Russians I think have a lot more information here than they are sharing today," Rogers told Fox News. "They've kind of let us peek under the curtain a

little bit, but it's very clear to me that they have valuable information that, A, they should have provided earlier, and B, that we need to get now to understand what happened when he went back to Russia."

Shortly thereafter, Putin and President Obama had their second conversation on the topic, after which Putin publicly professed to have little of value to offer because the Tsarnaev's hadn't been living in Russia.

Mr. Putin said last week that the Federal Security Service was unable to provide "information which had operative value" about the Tsarnaev brothers, "due to the fact that the Tsarnaevs had not lived in Russia for many years."

Mr. Putin's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, repeated that phrase after the two presidents spoke on Monday, but he said cooperation between the countries' counterterrorism and intelligence services had improved to new levels as a result of the Boston bombing.

"This aroused praise from Putin and Obama, and their satisfaction," Mr. Peskov told the Interfax news service, adding that cooperation on intelligence "on the whole promotes mutual confidence in bilateral relations."

The White House offered a more reserved account of the two leaders' conversation, noting "the close cooperation that the United States has received from Russia on the Boston Marathon attack."

Meanwhile, a WSJ story from last week catalogued all the things Russia either did not turn over in timely fashion or did turn over with errors:

- (Possibly) that Canadian

alleged extremist William Plotnikov –whom Russia killed last July – had implicated Tamerlan as an associate in 2010

- The original tip from the FSB provided incorrect birth dates for Tamerlan
- FSB provided no response to three requests for more information from FBI
- Texts from Tamerlan’s mother telling another relative he’d be interested in joining jihad
- Details from Tamerlan’s trip to Russia in which FSB alleges he met with militants

To be sure, some of this reluctance to share information is a very normal imperative to protect sources and methods, as the WSJ points out.

U.S. officials say they don’t know why the text messages weren’t provided earlier. They surmised Russia didn’t provide other information because they wanted to protect their sources or because they didn’t give the information much credibility themselves.

To be sure, U.S. law-enforcement officials say it isn’t clear whether knowing the content of the text messages would have changed what the FBI learned in 2011 about Mr. Tsarnaev’s turn toward radicalization. A senior U.S. law-enforcement official also notes that the FBI, in sharing information with the Russians, often withholds details that

could reveal its own sources and methods.

And of course this was all taking place in the aftermath of America's bust of Anna Chapman's spy ring in June 2010 (and the 2008-2010 fight over Viktor Bout's extradition to the US surely didn't help matters). So some of Putin's reluctance to share this intelligence naturally stems from deep suspicion between the countries.

Still, as Kasparov notes, the FSB has a history of "missing" terror attacks when it suits them.

All of which leads to the latest development in Putin's chess match: the claimed exposure of a CIA spy working under official cover, Ryan Fogle, complete with rather unconvincing wigs and childlike spy toys. Predictably, FSB just so happens to be accusing Fogle of trying to recruit an FSB officer working counterterrorism in the Caucasus.

Mr. Fogle had been trying to recruit a Russian intelligence services officer responsible for fighting Islamist terrorists in Russia's Caucasus region, the Federal Security Service said.

And they're now using this theatrical production as an excuse for warming relations to chill again.

Russian officials expressed surprise at what they characterized as an attempt to recruit a security officer responsible for fighting Islamist terrorists in the Caucasus as the sides had announced cooperation on the issue.

"At first, we couldn't believe it happened," an unnamed FSB officer told U.S. Embassy officials who had come to pick up Mr. Fogle after his detention, according to a video released by the FSB. "When relations between our countries are strengthening, an American

diplomat commits in our view a state crime against the Russian Federation.” Russia’s Foreign Ministry blasted an act it said was in “the spirit of the Cold War” and “raises serious questions for the American side.”

It is unusual, according to former intelligence officials, for U.S. spies to be identified and even rarer for them to be publicly shamed. Tuesday’s expulsion was the first of a U.S. diplomat from Russia on espionage charges since the early 2000s.

Golly. What a surprise that the FSB found a spy they could use to prevent the US from learning what Tamerlan was really doing in Chechnya last year.

‘Where do you come from?’ said the Red Queen. ‘And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don’t twiddle your fingers all the time.’

Alice attended to all these directions, and explained, as well as she could, that she had lost her way.

‘I don’t know what you mean by YOUR way,’ said the Queen: ‘all the ways about here belong to ME—but why did you come out here at all?’ she added in a kinder tone. ‘Curtsey while you’re thinking what to say, it saves time.’