

LOUIS FREEH DEFENDING IRAN- CONTRA TYPE ARMS DEALS ALONG WITH BANDAR

There's an aspect of the Louis Freeh interview on Frontline I find fascinating.

In defense of his client, Saudi Prince Bandar, on allegations that Bandar received billions in bribes associated with a huge BAE defense contract, Freeh mostly tries to pretend there's a meaningful distinction between the Saudi family and high government officials in it. Thus, the plane and estate that Bandar got in connection with the BAE deal are actually government-owned facilities he has use of.

And conveniently, Freeh hasn't looked at the Swiss Bank Accounts or the Yamamah contract, so he can't comment on their legality.

But I'm also fascinated by a more subtle tactic Freeh uses—to implicate high ranking Americans (and Brits) in the use of the funds.

He explains away that structure of the al Yamamah contract to Congressional intransigence during the Reagan Administration. Congress wouldn't let the Administration sell planes to Saudi Arabia, so what was Reagan to do except encourage Margaret Thatcher to set up a big corrupt contract to bypass this restriction?

Freeh: In other words, the United States, was not able to sell the Saudis F15s, and I think you understand the origin to this contract. The King sent Prince Bandar, my client, to President Reagan with very specific instructions, "Buy F15s." And of course the United States had armed the Saudi armed forces for the last 20 years before that.

President Reagan said to my client, "Congress will never approve the sale of F15s." My client then went up to the hill, spoke to senior leadership on both sides of the aisle, and they said, "We can't authorize the purchase of F15s by the King of Saudi Arabia." He went back to President Reagan who said, "Go talk to Maggie Thatcher," which my client did. That's how Tornados and the treaty, not the contract but the treaty between the two countries, was originated.

He wanted to buy the planes in the United States.

[snip]

So there was only one bidder here by default and that was the British Aerospace Systems and the Toranado, at least as the contract began. So the way the treaty was set up, if the Ministry of Defense and Aviation wanted to purchase U.S. arms, U.S. arms could be purchased through BAE and DESO, which was the U.K. Ministry that did the purchasing, and that was sort of a way to purchase arms, transparent way to purchase arms, but in a way that did not deal with the objection of the U.S. Congress to the selling of American equipment to the Saudis.

While we knew that was the purpose of the contract, I still find it galling that Freeh dismisses Reagan's effort to bypass Congressional restrictions so easily.

And then Freeh makes a point of listing the Presidents who flew on ~~Bandar's~~ plane the plane the Saudi government allowed Bandar to paint and use almost exclusively.

Louis Freeh: No, absolutely not, absolutely not. The plane was assigned to him. He traveled more than the Minister of Foreign Affairs because of

the intricate relationship he had between three United States presidents, Lowell, and the King of Saudi Arabia. But the king used the plane, three of our U.S. presidents used the plane, prime ministers used the plane. The fact of the matter is, you know, whatever arguments and inferences you want to make, he did not own the plane.

I'm assuming the three Presidents were Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II. But is this news? I mean, last I checked, the President—whichever one you're talking about—has his own plane, Air Force One. But apparently all our presidents make a habit of flying around on Bandar's own plane.

Why?

In any case, I find Freeh's inclusion of those two details rather curious. At one level, he spends a lot of time excusing the Brits for dismissing the investigation after Bandar threatened to stop cooperating on terrorism.

Louis Freeh: No, not necessarily. If the President of the United States told the FBI, maybe this former supervisor's equivalent, "Look, I know this is an important criminal investigation but for political reasons and for foreign policy reasons, we don't want the Department of Justice to continue the investigation because there are very dangerous and impactful consequences that will flow from that investigation" the prosecutor is required to close that investigation.

The prosecutor can't conduct totally unrestricted inquiries particularly if it impacts on the national security or the foreign relations of a country. So I think that's what happened in England, not in the United States by the way, and I don't find that to be unusual, given my experience and given the sensitive

issues that were involved in this case.

At the same time, neither Lowell Bergman nor Freeh mentions the allegations that this contract created a slush fund used to fund covert operations.

Freeh seems intent in raising details of those ops—and implicating all our recent presidents in them—along with his more general defense of Prince Bandar.