

OBAMA'S COMMITMENT TO ATROCITIES PREVENTION LASTS LESS THAN 3 WEEKS

Remember how Obama rolled out a campaign to prevent atrocities three weeks ago? "Never again"?

The other day, here's how the Vice President expressed that fierce commitment to preventing atrocities in a meeting with a man whose country has been committing them. (This is the White House readout of the meeting.)

Vice President Biden met this afternoon with Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa of Bahrain. The Vice President reaffirmed the United States' commitment to our long-standing partnership with the Government of Bahrain and discussed with the Crown Prince steps to strengthen those ties. The Vice President expressed concern about the recent escalation of street violence, including attacks against security forces. The Vice President also underscored the importance of ensuring fundamental rights for all Bahrainis and the need for greater progress by the government on accountability for past abuses, police reform and integration, and inclusive political dialogue.

And where the readout says "the Vice President reaffirmed the US commitment to our long-standing partnership" with this atrocity committing state? That translated into the announcement that the US was going to sell weapons to Bahrain.

The Obama Administration no doubt knows how bad this looks. Josh Rogin says one point of this weapon sale is to buck up the Crown Prince's

power within the Bahraini regime.

“The administration didn’t want the crown prince to go home empty-handed because they wanted to empower him,” said Tom Malinowski, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch, who was arrested in Bahrain while documenting protests there last month. “They placed a lot of hope in him, but he can’t deliver unless the king lets him and right now the hard-liners in the ruling family seem to have the upper hand.”

The crown prince has been stripped of many of his official duties recently, but is still seen as the ruling family member who is most amenable to working constructively with the opposition and with the United States. It’s unclear whether sending him home with arms sales will have any effect on internal Bahraini ruling family politics, however.

But while the Crown Prince met with Obama’s most important cabinet members—in addition to Biden, Leon Panetta and Hillary Clinton—there’s no public hint Obama met with him personally (Obama was busy campaigning for part of the time), which might have raised his stock but would tie Obama more closely to this decision.

The State Department insists that none of the weapons they’re selling (of which they have provided no public list—you’ll just have to trust them) can be used for “crowd control.” Less explicit, though clearly understood by all, is that these arms will target—um, defend Bahrain from—Iran. CNN’s sources talk about interoperability. And State Department officials who, at a briefing, connected this arms sale to the Strategic Cooperation Forum—basically a closer military cooperation between the GCC and the US which Hillary rolled out at the end of March in Riyadh. At that meeting, Hillary explicitly tied

“interoperability” to Iran.

In today’s inaugural session of the Strategic Cooperation Forum, I underscored the rock-solid commitment of the United States to the people and nations of the Gulf. And I thanked my colleagues for the GCC’s many positive contributions to regional and global security, particularly the GCC’s leadership in bringing about a peaceful transition within Yemen. We hope this forum will become a permanent addition to our ongoing bilateral discussions that exist between the United States and each nation that is a member of the GCC. We believe this forum offers opportunities to deepen and further our multilateral cooperation on shared challenges, including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and piracy, as well as broader economic and strategic ties.

Among other things, it should help the American and GCC militaries pursue in concert a set of practical steps, such as improving interoperability, cooperating on maritime security, furthering ballistic missile defense for the region, and coordinating responses to crises. Let me turn to a few of the specific challenges facing the region that we discussed.

I will start with Iran, which continues to threaten its neighbors and undermine regional security, including through its support for the Assad regime’s murderous campaign in Syria, threats against the freedom of navigation in the region, and interference in Yemen. The entire world was outraged by reports that Iran was plotting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States and by allegations of Iranian involvement in recent terrorist attacks in India, Georgia, and Thailand.

Of course, the most pressing concern is over Iran's nuclear activities. [my emphasis]

Scary Iran Plot! Drink!

This effort didn't receive close coverage (here's Karen DeYoung's take, which is one of the better accounts). But here's what one Iranian PressTV commentator argues is going on.

Military cooperation between the United States and the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council [(P)GCC] is nothing new and the Council is the biggest customer of the American weaponry. The establishment of the "Strategic Cooperation Forum" indicates official US membership in the Council. Political developments in the past three decades have shown that neither individual members of the (P)GCC, nor its totality, enjoys efficient strategic thinking and their policies rapidly change as a result of environmental factors. Once they supported Saddam in his war against Iran and, in another time, they helped the US occupy Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein. Then they reached the conclusion that by invading Iraq, the US has practically delivered that country to Iran in a silver platter.

The (P)GCC, in association with the US, is currently playing a counterrevolutionary role in the ongoing developments of the Arab world and popular uprisings in these countries. Its members are fearful of the spillover of popular protests into their countries and try to use their financial and political clout to change the course of revolutions in the Arab countries.

After the fall of Saddam, the Saudis asked Washington to attack Syria so that a Sunni government would take over in

Damascus as a counterbalance to Iraq's Shia state. After a while, the Saudi king went to Syria to start a new round of economic and political relations between Riyadh and Damascus and prevent the assassination of former Lebanese premier, Rafiq Hariri, from obstructing that path. Following the breakout of unrests in Syria, Saudi Arabia and Qatar found it a golden opportunity to pursue their past policy for the establishment of a Salafi state in Damascus.

So is this an effort to temper Saudis' and other Gulf Oil Sheikh's worst instincts—rather than direct war, intensifying cold war with Iran, rather than directly arming terrorists to take down Iranian surrogates, cover for those efforts in exchange for lower oil prices and greater US security guarantees? Complete with signature strikes, if the Saudis ask nicely and provide us with a made-to-order bomb plot to justify it all?

In any case, fresh off the Bahraini reformer convincing us to give them arms, Bahrain's non-reformer Prime Minister heads to Riyadh with plans for closer union with other GCC states, starting with Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Gulf leaders at a meeting in Riyadh on Monday will discuss a Saudi proposal to develop their six-nation council into a union, likely to start with the kingdom and unrest-hit Bahrain, officials said.

The Gulf Cooperation Council leaders "will discuss a form of union between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain," said a top Gulf official, requesting anonymity.

Bahrain's state minister for information, Samira Rajab, revealed that a Saudi proposal to evolve the GCC into a union will be on the agenda of the Riyadh meeting, adding that the idea backed by Bahrain could start with two

or three members.

Well, if nothing else, surely the Bahrainis will continue to be able to get their “crowd control” weapons from the Saudis.

Now, all this was blatantly apparent when Obama announced a new kind of GRAHVITY that applied only to Iran and Syria. Either because we’re too dependent on the Saudis or due to real cynicism or because the US got caught flat-footed with the Arab Spring and the Saudis were able to manipulate our indecision, the nice words on preventing atrocities only applied to those we opposed.