

SOMEONE DOESN'T WANT THE SANAA EMBASSY STORMING INVESTIGATED

I have hesitated to comment on this Thomas Joscelyn piece, which basically plays a game of Six Degrees of Osama bin Laden to suggest al Qaeda “was responsible” for all the attacks on US diplomatic locations last month. Partly, Joscelyn pulled together such a hodge podge of speculation, claims that have already been debunked, and tangential ties, it didn't seem worth it. Partly, using Joscelyn's standard of evidence we'd have “proof” that the right wingers who made the Muslim Innocence movie were in cahoots with al Qaeda.

But I confess I did hope someone was nearby to give Joscelyn smelling salts when this news first started breaking: a Yemeni security employee at the US Embassy in Sanaa (at one point reported to be in charge of security there) was killed today, using tactics that made the murder look like an AQAP hit.

Of course, the murder makes it likely that neither the murder nor the storming of the Embassy—which was apparently aided by insiders—were committed by al Qaeda. That's because the victim, Qassem Aqlani, was likely killed because he was investigating the storming of the Embassy.

Aqlani had been working for the U.S. Embassy for nearly 20 years, said the officials who spoke to the AP condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Most recently, he was in charge of investigating a Sept. 12 assault on the U.S. Embassy by angry Yemeni protesters over the anti-Islam film.

Protesters stormed the embassy and set fire to a U.S. flag before government forces dispersed them with tear gas.

As Gregory Johnsen notes today, AQAP usually claims credit when their attacks are successful. And while they might have reason to claim credit for the storming of the Embassy but still kill the guy investigating it (to hide the insiders they've recruited), it seems more likely that both events have been made to look like AQAP to give someone else cover (something Yemen-based lawyer Haykal Bafana was joking about yesterday).

Of course, it's possible that the culprit is someone—perhaps someone close to Ali Abdullah Saleh—who has convenient ties to AQAP figures, but who is operating to serve a different power.

There's some weird shit going down in the Middle East—and I definitely include Syria in this—and I think we all risk oversimplifying when we jump to conclusions who is pulling the strings.

All that said, there is an uncomfortable tie to Benghazi. In yesterday's hearing Charlene Lamb pointed to our Embassy security in Sanaa as an optimal form of cooperation with locals. I figured the second she said it, she would live to regret the comment, if for no other reason than the storming of the Embassy the day after the Benghazi attack. Sadly, I didn't expect someone with a key role in that cooperative security would be targeted for his cooperative role.

Update: Yemen-based journalist Adam Baron says Aqlani had nothing to do with the investigation into the storming last month.