

PUTIN'S CONGRESSIONAL PUPPETS

I have to give this to Michele Bachmann. Unlike most of the members of Congress she traveled to Russia with last week, she has not (at least not apparently) been suckered by Vladimir Putin to play his patsy.

Jim already described Dana Rohrabacher's posturing with Steven Seagal while he attempted to replay his glory days palling around with the mujahadeen. Subsequent to that, Rohrabacher defended Putin's abuse of power in fighting his former soulmates.

"If you are in the middle of an insurrection with Chechnya, and hundreds of people are being killed and there are terrorist actions taking place and kids are being blown up in schools, yeah, guess what, there are people who overstep the bounds of legality," he said.

While the rule of law is important, Rohrabacher added, "We shouldn't be describing people who are under this type of threat, we shouldn't be describing them as if they are Adolf Hitler or they're back to the old Communism days."

Meanwhile, both Rohrabacher and Steve King bravely defended Putin's prosecution of Pussy Riot.

"It's hard to find sympathy for people who would do that to people's faith," King said.

But I'm most amused by the script William Keating (who represents parts of Boston and its southwest suburbs) is speaking from, parroting

FSB's assurances that the Marathon attack could have been prevented if only FBI had been more responsive to the tip they had provided the FBI and CIA.

Keating said the letter contained a lot of details about Tamerlan Tsarnaev, including his birthday, telephone number, cellphone number, where he lived in Cambridge and information about his wife and child. He said it also referenced the possibility that Tsarnaev might be considering changing names.

The Russians also had information about his mother, including her Skype address, Keating said.

Keating told the AP that the Russians believed Tsarnaev wanted to go to Palestine and engage in terrorist activities, but was unable to master the language.

“That was the level of detail they were providing in this letter,” Keating said.

Keating said the intelligence officials believed that if Russia and the U.S. had worked together more closely, the bombings might have been averted. He said a top Russian counterintelligence official told the delegation that “had we had the same level of communication as we do now, the Boston bombing may never have happened.”

Note Keating doesn't make clear whether the details from the texts on Palestine were included in what the Russians sent us (the Russians translated the letter for the CODEL), or whether they only now shared it with the CODEL.

Today, Russian authorities are repeating the claim that the US could have prevented the attack.

A senior Russian official said Tuesday that the Boston Marathon bombings could have been prevented if American officials had followed through with Russian intelligence.

Officials previously hewed to President Vladimir Putin's statement that Russia had no information that could have prevented the attacks.

"The Russian side warned the American side about the Tsarnaev brothers, but this information was not taken seriously by the American side, which is what led to that tragedy," Valentina Matvienko, the speaker of Russia's senate, said Tuesday, referring to suspects Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the Interfax news agency reported.

Keating, who serves on the Homeland Security Counterterrorism Subcommittee whose hearing FBI refused to attend (but not on the House Intelligence Committee that has received more detailed briefing), seems to be parroting the Russians in part out of spite that the FBI didn't share this information with his Committee.

Keating said he was impressed with what he saw as the forthcoming nature of the Russian intelligence officials.

Meanwhile, he said, FBI officials were absent from Capitol Hill hearings about the bombings.

"We had a hearing on homeland security and [the Boston FBI office] were invited," Keating said. When asked whether agents from the office had shown up, he responded: "No."

But he appears not to have read all that's available in the press. He ignores the multiple reports on reluctance with which Russians shared information.

He ignores this WSJ report appears to make it clear that the Russians withheld the basis for their concern – the actual text messages – in spite of multiple efforts from FBI to get more information.

Russia withheld a crucial piece of information from the U.S. before the Boston bombings, U.S. officials say, bolstering a concern that distrust between the two governments erased an opportunity to avert the disaster.

In 2011, Russia sent an alert to the Federal Bureau of Investigation about alleged bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev, prompted in part by text messages between his mother and a Russian relative.

[snip]

U.S. officials call these text messages the most important in a series of missed signals between the two countries.

[snip]

The U.S. officials say they learned about them roughly a week after the April 15 bombings.

[snip]

On March 4, 2011, the Russian security service sent a formal request via the U.S. embassy in Moscow asking the FBI to look into Mr. Tsarnaev, U.S. officials said. At that time, the Russians didn't mention the texts and made reference only to Mr. Tsarnaev's interest in joining "underground" groups, a term that to U.S. ears could suggest political opposition, Dagestani officials said.

Not to mention WSJ's report that, among other things, the Russians provided the wrong birth date for Tamerlan.

Mr. Tsarnaev provided his correct birth date, which was different from the two provided by the Russians.

Nor has Keating emphasized what Congressman Steve Cohen has – that in spite of the Russians' purported concerns about Tamerlan, they seem to have lost track of him when he was in Dagestan.

Rep. Steve Cohen said Sunday that Russian officials seemed not to have known that Tamerlan Tsarnaev went to Dagestan, a restive Caucasus province racked by an insurgency, for six months last year when he returned to Russia.

The WSJ report, incidentally, suggests Putin and people in Dagestan have offered conflicting stories about how closely they followed Tamerlan while he was in Dagestan.

In short, Keating delivered precisely the message Russia seems to want to push now, which is that shortcomings within American (and especially FBI) commitment to fighting (Russian) terrorists – and not Russian reluctance to turn over detailed information – meant the US failed to prevent the attack.

There's one other detail that FSB used made public through Keating: US and Russian intelligence personnel were discussing Ibragim Todashev as early as April 21 (which is still later than Todashev's friend Khusev Taramov claims the FBI first contacted Todashev, but may have coincided with the delivery of the actual text messages involving Tamerlan's mother).

Keating said that Ibragim Todashev, the 27-year-old friend of Tsarnaev who was shot and killed by an FBI agent in Orlando on May 22, was mentioned by name in intelligence exchanges between US and Russian officials on April 21. The nature of that citation, he said, remains unclear.

This disclosure curiously coincides with Russia's announcement that it has asked for investigative documents on Todashev, and the FBI's announcement that it will finally stop blabbing to the press about what happened.

On Monday, Russia's state-owned media reported that the country's officials have asked the FBI to hand over investigative documents related to Todashev's shooting.

"As soon as information appeared in the press about the death of Ibragim Todashev, the Russian embassy in Washington, according to established practices and on the basis of bilateral consulate conventions, sent an inquiry to the appropriate US government agencies requesting confirmation of this information," Konstantin Dolgov, Russia's top human rights official, said in an interview with ITAR-TASS, a state-owned news organization based in Moscow.

Dolgov told the media outlet that the Russians have requested Todashev's autopsy report – which currently remains sealed – as well as documentation related to the firearms used in the shooting.

FBI officials in Tampa and Boston have said they will not be releasing any further information on the shooting. An FBI spokesman in Washington D.C. did not respond to requests for comment.

Clearly, Putin continues to play Americans like a chess master. Does he consider Members of Congress mere pawns?

But here's the other detail I like. Along with a top counterintelligence official, Sergei Beseda, the CODEL met with what WaPo calls a CI officer specializing in the North Caucasus.

They met with Sergei Beseda, a high-

level FSB official, as well as a counterintelligence officer who specializes in the North Caucasus, legislators and policymakers.

That would put their interlocutors in the same line of work as the FSB officer Ryan Fogle allegedly tried to recruit.

The speaker says Fogle twice called his target – an officer involved in counterterrorism in the restive North Caucasus – and proposed that he spy for the United States.

So basically the colleague of the guy the US allegedly tried to recruit is now feeding our CODEL a script to pawn (heh) off blame onto the FBI for the failure to stop the attempt.