

Who Benefits from Russia's 'Peculiar' Doping Violations?

The Winter Olympics concluded with two Russian athletes testing positive for banned substances. But the doping would have made little sense in terms of gaining a competitive edge, leading Rick Sterling to wonder who benefits?

By Rick Sterling

Viewers of the 2018 Winter Olympics were offered a constant reminder of Russia's supposed deviousness with the "OAR" – or Olympic Athlete from Russia – designation that Russian athletes competed under as a punishment for doping. The image of Russia being penalized for cheating fit in neatly with ongoing geopolitical narratives of Russia being blamed for election meddling in the United States and military aggression in Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin had claimed earlier that the U.S. invented the doping allegations in an attempt to influence Russia's March 18 presidential election, a position reiterated by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov who claimed that the U.S. had used its influence within the International Olympic Committee to "orchestrate the doping scandal."

But despite these Russian claims, the image of Russia as a cheater were re-confirmed at the close of the Olympic Games when two additional Russians were caught using banned substances.

Yet, there is something very fishy about the Anti Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) pinned on the Russian curler and Russian bobsledder during the final week of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

It defies logic that an athlete would do a one-time consumption of a chemical that is of no value in circumstances where it is almost certain to be detected with huge negative consequences.

That is precisely the situation. The Russian Mixed Curling bronze medal winner, Alexander Krushelnitsky, had to forfeit his medal, plus that of his partner wife, because traces of meldonium were found in his urine sample. He had previously tested clean. Meldonium is a medication which helps keep the heart healthy by increasing blood flow.

That would be of no benefit in a sport like curling which requires accuracy, strategy and focus but is not taxing physically. The "sweeping" to help guide the rock down the ice lasts only 20 seconds or less. International curlers were

astounded at the news and bemused at the idea of performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) for curling. The skip of the Danish curling team said "I think most people will laugh and ask, 'what could you possibly need doping for?'"

Krushelnitsky strongly denies taking banned drugs. "I am categorically opposed to doping. ... never, at any time that I have been involved in sport, have I ever used prohibited substances."

Similar curious circumstances apply in the second ADRV. Russian bobsledder Nadezhda Sergeeva had numerous negative (clean) tests before she was tested positive for banned trimetazidine. Bobsledding is another sport which requires physical and mental skill but not physical endurance.

In the February 25 IOC meeting to close the Pyeongchang Winter Games, the head of the IOC Implementation Group, Nicole Hovertz, said the Russian athletes had been tested "more than any other athletes." She and her group were convinced that the 168-member Russian athletic team was clean. At about 82:00 in the video, she says the two Russian doping violations were "so peculiar."

She introduced the Director of the IOC Medical and Scientific Commission, Dr. Bludgett, to provide more detail. He suggested that meldonium would not be of benefit in curling. He then went further and suggested the ADRV regarding trimetazidine may be in error. He said trimetazidine "is a substance where there is a parent compound which is a common headache migraine treatment available particularly in China and Japan and if that is found then it is not considered an ADRV. And if there is a very low level, as there was in this case, that is a possibility."

Sergeeva denies ever taking banned drugs and even went on social media with a T-shirt declaring her commitment to clean sport.

In summary, it seems highly unlikely that two different Russian athletes would intentionally take medications that have no benefit but which are almost guaranteed to be detected resulting in huge harm to them and their team.

Who Benefits?

Another possibility is that meldonium or trimetazidine powder was surreptitiously put in the food of the athletes. This one-time consumption would cause a positive test.

In fact there are forces on the international scene who are pleased that Russia has been battling defamation and charges of "state sponsored doping" for the past two years. They want the current denigration and punishments of Russia to continue, perhaps influencing Russia's upcoming national election and

undermining Russia's hosting of the World Cup this summer.

One such group is the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The CIA has a long history of large and small criminal deeds. Presumably it would not be difficult for them to infiltrate Olympic facilities or bribe a corrupt individual to put traces of meldonium or another powder in someone's food or drink.

Those who quickly dismiss this possibility probably also thought that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in 2002. That was a false claim supported by evidence fabricated by the CIA.

It is well documented the CIA carries out murders, coups and major sabotage. The CIA has documented some of their methods in "The Official CIA Manual of Trickery and Deception". They don't just carry out assassinations and coups. In the book "In Search of Enemies", former CIA officer John Stockwell documented how the CIA created a false story about Cuban soldiers raping Angolan women to defame Cuba.

Corrupt police forces sometimes plant evidence on a suspect they wish to convict. It would be essentially the same thing to get a Russian athlete to ingest spiked food or beverage. The CIA has motive and expressed intent:

In contrast with Russian leaders who call the US a "partner", US officials increasingly call Russia an "adversary". The latest US National Security Strategy explicitly says they intend to respond to Russia as an adversary: "The United States will respond to the growing political, economic and military competitions we face around the world. China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity."

Despite the lack of clear evidence, there is widespread belief that Russia "meddled" in the US election. The anti-Russia sentiment has been fanned into the exaggerated claim that the unproven Russian action was "an act of war, an act of hybrid warfare".

Neoconservative forces openly talk about "punishing" Russia. The former Deputy Director of the CIA, Michael Morrell, said, "We need to make the Russians pay a price." He confirmed on public television that means killing Russians (and Iranians) in Syria. This is the 33-year veteran CIA leader who publicly campaigned for Hillary Clinton.

Did the CIA plant the doping evidence? We don't know for certain but it should not be dismissed out of hand. The CIA has the means, opportunity and above all the motive to falsely implicate Russians in new doping cases with the goal of preventing Russia from getting beyond the international sporting sanctions and punishments. They have done vastly more deceitful, manipulative, and outrageous

things than this.

Media Bias

Unfortunately, Western media will not investigate this possibility. Western media cannot even accurately report on events like the IOC meeting yesterday. The fact that the head of the IOC Implementation Group warmly praised the Russian participation at the Pyeongchang Olympics is not mentioned in Western media.

The fact that Dr. Bludgett raised questions about the accuracy of the ADRVs against Russia is not mentioned in reports from New York Times, the Guardian or Inside the Games. Instead, the writer at Inside the Games once again exaggerated the voice of critics of Russia as he downplayed the voices of international athletes who want to put the doping scandal behind and move forward.

Western media have reported deceptively that the Russian athletes have “admitted” to the violations. In fact, both Russian athletes strongly deny taking banned drugs.

Western media bias is also shown in the focus on alleged Russian doping and minimization or ignoring of other possible violations. For example the story about the Norwegian cross-country ski team and their use of banned asthmatic medications. They get around the restrictions by having their doctor claim that most of their athletes are asthmatic. This situation is a result of the inconsistent rules and regulations. A Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) can be given to any athlete designated by a doctor and in secrecy. They are not required to publicly disclose this, giving incentive to corruption and misuse.

Richard McLaren’s Bias

The World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) has also been biased. More than a year ago, their investigator Richard McLaren claimed “over one thousand Russian athletes benefited” from the alleged Russian conspiracy to cheat the ant-doping system. McLaren said the proof would be provided to the various sport federations. In September 2017 it was revealed that charges had been filed against 96 athletes.

Of these, WADA cleared 95 athletes of wrongdoing; only one athlete was proven to be in violation. More recently, the Court of Arbitration in Sport completely overturned the bans on 28 Russian athletes. In summary, it appears that McLaren’s accusation about “over one thousand athletes benefiting” was a huge exaggeration or fabrication.

Where Do Things Go From Here?

The IOC Executive Board has indicated they intend to lift the suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee if no more “anti doping rule violations” are found in the last batch of athlete samples from the Pyeongchang Olympics. The results are expected in a few days.

Another ADRV may appear. If so, that will greatly complicate the effort to reintegrate Russian athletics. Even if the final tests are all clean, those who oppose Russia will continue trying to delay or prevent the full integration of Russia within the world sporting community.

The former Moscow Laboratory Director Grigory Rodchenkov is the primary weapon in the campaign accusing Russia of “state sponsored doping.”

The Russians have been accused of trying to murder Rodchenkov. But if he suddenly dies one day, it is more likely to be by the CIA. At this point, Rodchenkov has done all the damage he can to Russian sports. The only thing he could possibly do is to recant or fall apart. His handlers have prevented him from appearing before the various committees looking into the accusations. At this point, Rodchenkov could be more valuable dead than alive. His death would be a powerful weapon to disrupt the normalization of relations with Russia.

In conclusion, going back to the Pyeongchang Olympics, there should be caution before assuming the guilt of the Russian athletes who received ADRVs. It makes no sense that two Russian athletes would take useless medications knowing they will be tested and found out.

The doping incident serves the interests of those in the West who seek more not less conflict and seek to weaken Russia through “hybrid” warfare. The CIA has the means, opportunity and motive, as well as the experience and history.

If this is true, it’s another example of the dangerous descent in international relations. The Olympics movement has the goal of fostering peaceful relations. The sad truth is there are forces who want to prevent that. They prefer to demonize and divide in a quest for economic and geopolitical supremacy over “adversaries.” International sports is just another arena for them.

Rick Sterling is an investigative journalist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. He can be reached at rsterling1@gmail.com.

Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities

Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn

As President Donald Trump prepares to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week, a group of U.S. intelligence veterans offers corrections to a number of false accusations that have been levelled against Iran.

February 26, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: War With Iran

INTRODUCTION

In our December 21st Memorandum to you, we cautioned that the claim that Iran is currently the world's top sponsor of terrorism is unsupported by hard evidence. Meanwhile, other false accusations against Iran have intensified. Thus, we feel obliged to alert you to the virtually inevitable consequences of war with Iran, just as we warned President George W. Bush six weeks before the U.S. attack on Iraq 15 years ago.

In our first Memorandum in this genre we told then-President Bush that we saw "no compelling reason" to attack Iraq, and warned "the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic." The consequences will be far worse, should the U.S. become drawn into war with Iran. We fear that you are not getting the straight story on this from your intelligence and national security officials.

After choosing "War With Iran" for the subject-line of this Memo, we were reminded that we had used it before, namely, for a Memorandum to President Obama on August 3, 2010 in similar circumstances. You may wish to ask your staff to give you that one to read and ponder. It included a startling quote from then-Chairman of President Bush Jr.'s Intelligence Advisory Board (and former national security adviser to Bush Sr.) Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who told the *Financial Times* on October 14, 2004 that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had George W. Bush "mesmerized;" that "Sharon just has him wrapped around his little finger." We wanted to remind you of that history, as you prepare to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week.

* * *

Rhetoric vs. Reality

We believe that the recent reporting regarding possible conflict with nuclear-

armed North Korea has somewhat obscured consideration of the significantly higher probability that Israel or even Saudi Arabia will take steps that will lead to a war with Iran that will inevitably draw the United States in. Israel is particularly inclined to move aggressively, with potentially serious consequences for the U.S., in the wake of the recent incident involving an alleged Iranian drone and the shooting down of an Israeli aircraft.

There is also considerable anti-Iran rhetoric in U.S. media, which might well facilitate a transition from a cold war-type situation to a hot war involving U.S. forces. We have for some time been observing with some concern the growing hostility towards Iran coming out of Washington and from the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster is warning that the “time to act is now” to thwart Iran’s aggressive regional ambitions while U.S. United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley sees a “wake-up” call in the recent shooting incident involving Syria and Israel. Particular concern has been expressed by the White House that Iran is exploiting Shi’a minorities in neighboring Sunni dominated states to create unrest and is also expanding its role in neighboring Iraq and Syria.

While we share concerns over the Iranian government’s intentions vis-à-vis its neighbors, we do not believe that the developments in the region, many of which came about through American missteps, have a major impact on vital U.S. national interests. Nor is Iran, which often sees itself as acting defensively against surrounding Sunni states, anything like an existential threat to the United States that would mandate the sustained military action that would inevitably result if Iran is attacked.

Iran’s alleged desire to stitch together a sphere of influence consisting of an arc of allied nations and proxy forces running from its western borders to the Mediterranean Sea has been frequently cited as justification for a more assertive policy against Tehran, but we believe this concern to be greatly exaggerated. Iran, with a population of more than 80 million, is, to be sure, a major regional power but militarily, economically and politically it is highly vulnerable.

Limited Military Capability

Tehran’s Revolutionary Guard is well armed and trained, but much of its “boots on the ground” army consists of militiamen of variable quality. Its Air Force is a “shadow” of what existed under the Shah and is significantly outgunned by its rivals in the Persian Gulf, not to mention Israel. Its navy is only “green water” capable in that it consists largely of smaller vessels responsible for coastal defense supplemented by the swarming of Revolutionary Guard small speedboats.

When Napoleon had conquered much of continental Europe and was contemplating invading Britain it was widely believed that England was helpless before him. British Admiral Earl St Vincent was unperturbed: "I do not say the French can't come, I only say they can't come by sea." We likewise believe that Iran's apparent threat is in reality decisively limited by its inability to project power across the water or through the air against neighboring states that have marked superiority in both respects.

The concern over a possibly developing "Shi'ite land bridge," also referred to as an "arc" or "crescent," is likewise overstated. It ignores the reality that Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon all have strong national identities and religiously mixed populations. They are influenced – some of them strongly – by Iran but they are not puppet states. And there is also an ethnic division that the neighboring states' populations are very conscious of– they are Arabs and Iran is Persian, which is also true of the Shi'a populations in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

Majority Shi'a Iraq, for example, is now very friendly to Iran but it has to deal with considerable Kurdish and Sunni minorities in its governance and in the direction of its foreign policy. It will not do Iran's bidding on a number of key issues, including Baghdad's relationship with Washington, and would be unwilling to become a proxy in Tehran's conflicts with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, the highest-ranking Sunni in the Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi government, has, for example, recently called for the demobilization of the Shi'ite Popular Mobilization Forces or militias that have been fighting ISIS because they "have their own political aspirations, their own [political] agendas. ... They are very dangerous to the future of Iraq."

Nuclear Weapons Thwarted

A major concern that has undergirded much of the perception of an Iranian threat is the possibility that Tehran will develop a nuclear weapon somewhere down the road. We believe that the current Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, even if imperfect, provides the best response to that Iranian proliferation problem. The U.N. inspections regime is strict and, if the agreement stands, there is every reason to believe that Iran will be unable to take the necessary precursor steps leading to a nuclear weapons program. Iran will be further limited in its options after the agreement expires in nine years. Experts believe that, at that point, Iran is not likely to choose to accumulate the necessary highly enriched uranium stocks to proceed.

The recent incident involving the shoot-down of a drone alleged to be Iranian, followed by the downing of an Israeli fighter by a Syrian air defense missile, resulted in a sharp response from Tel Aviv, though reportedly mitigated by a

warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin that anything more provocative might inadvertently involve Russia in the conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have moderated his response but his government is clearly contemplating a more robust intervention to counter what he describes as a developing Iranian presence in Syria.

In addition, Netanyahu may be indicted on corruption charges, and it is conceivable that he might welcome a "small war" to deflect attention from mounting political problems at home.

Getting Snookered Into War

We believe that the mounting Iran hysteria evident in the U.S. media and reflected in Beltway groupthink has largely been generated by Saudi Arabia and Israel, who nurture their own aspirations for regional political and military supremacy. There are no actual American vital interests at stake and it is past time to pause and take a step backwards to consider what those interests actually are in a region that has seen nothing but disaster since 2003. Countering an assumed Iranian threat that is minimal and triggering a war would exacerbate instability, likely leading to a breakdown in the current political alignment of the entire Middle East. It would be costly for the United States.

Iran is not militarily formidable, but its ability to fight on the defensive against U.S. naval and air forces is considerable and can cause high casualties. There appears to be a perception in the Defense Department that Iran could be defeated in a matter of days, but we would warn that such predictions tend to be based on overly optimistic projections, witness the outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, Tehran would be able again to unleash terrorist resources throughout the region, endangering U.S. military and diplomats based there as well as American travelers and businesses. The terrorist threat might easily extend beyond the Middle East into Europe and also the United States, while the dollar costs of a major new conflict and its aftermath could break the bank, literally.

Another major consideration before ratcheting up hostilities should be that a war with Iran might not be containable. As the warning from President Vladimir Putin to Netanyahu made clear, other major powers have interests in what goes on in the Persian Gulf, and there is a real danger that a regional war could have global consequences.

In sum, we see a growing risk that the U.S. will become drawn into hostilities on pretexts fabricated by Israel and Saudi Arabia for their actual common objective ("regime change" in Iran). A confluence of factors and misconceptions about what is at stake and how such a conflict is likely to develop, coming from

both inside and outside the Administration, has, unfortunately, made such an outcome increasingly likely.

We have seen this picture before, just 15 years ago in Iraq, which should serve as a warning. The prevailing perception of threat that the Mullahs of Iran allegedly pose directly against the security of the U.S. is largely contrived. Even if all the allegations were true, they would not justify an Iraq-style "preventive war" violating national as well as international law. An ill-considered U.S. intervention in Iran is surely not worth the horrific humanitarian, military, economic, and political cost to be paid if Washington allows itself to become part of an armed attack.

FOR THE STEERING GROUP, VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA's Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard Black, Virginia State Senator; former Marine officer in Vietnam, later Army Judge Advocate General officer, retiring as Colonel after 31 years

Kathleen Christison, CIA, Senior Analyst on Middle East (ret.)

Graham E. Fuller, Vice-Chair, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC Iraq; Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF; ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC) (ret.)

John Brady Kiesling, Foreign Service Officer; resigned Feb. 27, 2003 as Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Athens, in protest against the U.S. attack on Iraq (ret.)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Edward Loomis, Jr., former NSA Technical Director for the Office of Signals Processing (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimates Officer (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director of the Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs Office, State Department Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR), and former senior staffer on Senate Intelligence Committee (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who, like Political Counselor John Brady Kiesling, resigned in opposition to the war on Iraq
