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The Syria Endgame: Strategic Stage in the Pentagon's Covert War on Iran

By Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya

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Since the kindling of the conflict inside Syria in 2011, it was recognized, by friend and foe alike, that the events in that country were tied to a game plan that ultimately targets Iran, Syria's number one ally. [1] De-linking Syria from Iran and unhinging the Resistance Bloc that Damascus and Tehran have formed has been one of the objectives of the foreign-supported anti-government militias inside Syria. Such a schism between Damascus and Tehran would change the Middle East's strategic balance in favour of the US and Israel.

If this cannot be accomplished, however, then crippling Syria to effectively prevent it from providing Iran any form of diplomatic, political, economic, and military support in the face of common threats has been a primary objective. Preventing any continued cooperation between the two republics has been a strategic goal. This includes preventing the Iran-Iraq-Syria energy terminal from being built and ending the military pact between the two partners.

All Options are Aimed at Neutralizing Syria

Regime change in Damascus is not the only or main way for the US and its allies to prevent Syria from standing with Iran. Destabilizing Syria and neutralizing it as a failed and divided state is the key. Sectarian fighting is not a haphazard outcome of the instability in Syria, but an assisted project that the US and its allies have steadily fomented with a clear intent to balkanize the Syrian Arab Republic. Regionally, Israel above all other states has a major stake in securing this outcome. The Israelis actually have several publicly available documents, including the

Yinon Plan, which outline that the destruction of Syria into a series of smaller sectarian states is one of their strategic objectives. So do American military planners.

Like Iraq next door, Syria does not need to be formally divided. For all intents and purposes, the country can be divided like Lebanon was alongside various fiefdoms and stretches of territory controlled by different groups during the Lebanese Civil War. The goal is to disqualify Syria as an external player.



Since 2006 and the Israeli defeat in Lebanon in that year there was renewed focus on the strategic alliance between Iran and Syria. Both countries have been very resilient in the face of US designs in their region. Together both have been key players for influencing events in the Middle East, from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Their strategic alliance has undoubtedly played an important role in shaping the geo-political landscape in the Middle East. Although critics of Damascus say it has done very little in regard to substantial action against the Israelis, the Syrians have been the partners within this alliance that have carried the greatest weight in regards to facing Israel; it has been through Syria that Hezbollah and the Palestinians have been provided havens, logistics, and their initial strategic depth against Israel.

From the beginning the foreign-supported external opposition leaders made their foreign policy clear, which can strongly be argued was a reflection of the interests they served. The anti-government forces and their leaders even declared that they will realign Syria against Iran; in doing so they used sectarian language about returning to their “natural orbit with the Sunni Arabs.” This is a move that is clearly in favour of the US and Israel alike. Breaking the axis between Damascus and Tehran has also been a major goal of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Arab petro-sheikhdoms since the 1980s as part of a design to isolate Iran during the Iraq-Iran War. [2] Moreover, the sectarian language being used is part of a construct; it is not a reflection of reality, but a reflection of Orientalist conjecture and desires that falsely stipulate that Muslims who perceive themselves as being Shia or Sunni are inherently at odds with one another as enemies.

Among the prostrating Syrian opposition leaders who would execute the strategic goals of the US has been Burhan Ghalioun, the former president of the Istanbul-based and foreign-sponsored Syrian National Council, who told the *Wall Street Journal* in 2011 that Damascus would end its strategic alliance with Iran and end its support for Hezbollah and the Palestinians as soon as anti-government forces took over Syria. [3] These foreign-sponsored opposition figures have also served to validate, in one way or another, the broader narratives that claim Sunnis and Shiites hate one another. In synchronization the mainstream media in the countries working for regime change in Damascus, such as the US and France, have consistently advertized that the regime in Syria is an Alawite regime that is allied to Iran, because the Alawites are an offshoot of Shiism. This too is untrue, because Syria and Iran do not share a common ideology; both countries are aligned, because of a common threat and shared political and strategic objectives. Nor is Syria run by an Alawite regime; the government's composure reflects Syrian society's ethnic and religious diversity.

Israel's Stake in Syria

Syria is all about Iran for Israel. As if Tel Aviv has nothing to do whatsoever with the events inside Syria, Israeli commentators and analysts are now publicly insisting that Israel needs to deal with Iran by intervening inside Syria. Israel's involvement in Syria, alongside the US and NATO, crystallized in 2012. It was clear that Israel was working in a conglomerate comprised of the US, Britain, France, Turkey, NATO, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon's minority March 14 Alliance, and the NATO-supported usurpers that have taken over and wrecked the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Although it should be read with caution, it is worth noting the release of the hacked correspondence of Strategic Forecast Incorporated's Reva Bhalla to her boss, George Friedman, about a December 2011 meeting in the Pentagon between herself (representing Stratfor), US, French, and British officials about Syria. [4] The Stratfor correspondence claimed that the US and its allies had sent in their military special forces to destabilize Syria in 2011 and that there actually were not many Syrian anti-government forces on the ground or, as Bhalla writes, "there isn't much of a Free Syrian Army to train." [5] *The Daily Star*, which is owned by Lebanon's Hariri family which has been involved in the regime change operations against Syria, soon after reported that thirteen undercover French officers were caught by the Syrians conducting operations inside Homs. [6] Instead of a categorical no to the information about the captured French officers, the French Foreign Ministry's response to the public was that it could not confirm anything, which can be analyzed as an omission of guilt. [7]

Days earlier, Hezbollah's Al-Manar station revealed that Israeli-made weapons and supplies, ranging from grenades and night binoculars to communication devices, were captured alongside Qatari agents inside the insurgent stronghold of Baba Amr in Homs towards the end of April and start of March. [8] An unnamed US official would later confirm in July 2012 that the Mossad was working alongside the CIA in Syria. [9] Just a month earlier, in June, the Israeli government began publicly demanding that a military intervention be launched into Syria, presumably by the US and the conglomerate of governments working with Israel to destabilize Syria. [10]

The Israeli media has even begun to casually report that Israeli citizens, albeit one has been identified as an Israeli Arab (meaning a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship), have entered Syria to fight against the Syrian Army. [11] Normally any Israelis, specifically those that are non-Jewish Arabs, which enter Lebanon or/and Syria are condemned or prosecuted by Israeli

authorities and Israeli news reports focus on this aspect of the story. Yet, it has not been so in this case. It should also be mentioned that the Palestinian opponents of Israel living inside Syria are also being targeted, just as the Palestinians living in Iraq were targeted after the US and UK invaded in 2003.

Syria and the Objective of Making Iran Stand Alone

The journalist Rafael D. Frankel wrote a revealing article for the *Washington Quarterly* that illustrates what US policymakers and their partners think about in Syria. In his article Frankel argued that because of the so-called Arab Spring that an attack on Iran by the US and Israel would no longer trigger a coordinated regional response from Iran and its allies. [12] Frankel argued that because of the events inside Syria an opportunity has been created for the US and Israel to attack Iran without igniting a regional war that would involve Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. [13]

Frankel's line of thinking was not lost on circles in either NATO or Israel. In reality his line of thinking springs forth from the views and plans of these very circles. As a psychological enforcement of their ideas, his text actually found its way to NATO Headquarters in Brussels in 2012 for reading material. While the latter, Israel, released its own intelligence report about the subject.

According to the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*, the intelligence report by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has concluded that Syria and Hezbollah will no longer be able to open a second front against Israel should it go to war with Iran. [14] During the Israeli report's release, one senior Israeli official was quoted as saying "Iran's ability to harm Israel in response to an attack on our part declined dramatically." [15]

Many news wires, papers, and writers with hostile positions towards both Syria and Iran, such as *The Daily Telegraph*, immediately replicated the Israeli report's findings about Iran and its regional allies. Two of the first people to reproduce the findings of the Israel report, Robert Tait (writing from the Gaza Strip) and Damien McElroy (who was expelled from Libya in 2011 by that country's authorities during the war with NATO), summarize how significant the findings of the report are by effectively outlining how Iran's key allies in the Levant have all been neutralized. [16]

The Israeli report has triumphantly declared that Syria has turned within and is too busy to join ranks with its strategic ally Iran against Tel Aviv in a future war. [17] The ramifications of the Syrian crisis have also placed Iran's Lebanese allies, particularly Hezbollah, in an unsteady position where their supply lines are under threat and they have been politically damaged through their support of Damascus. If anyone in Lebanon should side with Iran in a future war the Israelis have said that they will invade through massive military operations on the ground. [18]

The new Egyptian government's role in aiding US objectives under President Morsi also becomes clear with what the Israeli report says about his supportive role: "The foreign ministry report also predicted that Egypt would stop Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement, from helping Iran by launching rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip." [19] This adds credence to the view that Morsi was allowed by the US and Israel to broker a peace between the Gaza Strip and Tel Aviv, which would prevent the Palestinians there from standing with Iran during a war. In other words the Egyptian truce was setup to bind the hands of Hamas. The recent announcements

about moves by Morsi's government to engage Hezbollah politically can also be scrutinized as an extension of the same strategy applied in Gaza, but in this case for unbinding Iran from its Lebanese allies. [20]

There is also clamouring for steps to be taken to de-link Hezbollah, and by extension Iran, from its Christian allies in Lebanon. The German Marshall Fund showcased a text essentially saying that the Lebanese Christians that are allies to Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran need to be presented with an alternative political narrative to replace the one where they believe that Iran will ultimately run the Middle East as a great power. [21] This too is tied to further eroding Iran's alliance system.

Mission Accomplished?

The conflict in Syria is not merely an Israeli affair. The slow bleeding of Syria has other interested parties that want to smash the country and its society into pieces. The US is foremost among these interested parties, followed by the Arab dictators of the petro-sheikhdoms. NATO has also always been covertly involved.

NATO's involvement in Syria is part of the US strategy of using the military alliance to dominate the Middle East. This is why it was decided to establish a component of the missile shield in Turkey. This is also the reason that Patriot missiles are being deployed to the Turkish border with Syria. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue are components of these plans too. Additionally, Turkey has ended its veto against the further integration of Israel into NATO. [22]

NATO has been reorienting itself towards asymmetrical warfare and greater emphasis is now being put on intelligence operations. NATO strategists have increasingly been studying the Kurds, Iraq, Hezbollah, Syria, Iran, and the Palestinians. In the scenario of an all-out war, NATO has been preparing itself for overt military roles in both Syria and Iran.

Iraq is being destabilized further too. While Iran's allies in Damascus have been weighed down, its allies in Baghdad have not. After Syria, the same conglomerate of countries working against Damascus will turn their attention to Iraq. They have already started working to galvanize Iraq further on the basis of its sectarian and political fault lines. Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are playing prominent roles in this objective. What is becoming manifest is that the differences between Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims that Washington has cultivated since the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 are now being augmented by Kurdish sectarianism.

It appears that many in the Israeli political establishment now believe that they have succeeded in breaking the Resistance Bloc. Whether they are correct or incorrect is a matter of debate. Syria still stands; the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (which was by far the most active Palestinian group fighting Israel from Gaza in 2012) and other Palestinians will side with Iran even if Hamas will have its hands tied by Egypt; there are still Tehran's allies in Iraq; and Syria is not the only supply line for Iran to arm its ally Hezbollah. What is also very clear is that the siege against Syria is a front in the covert multi-dimensional war against Iran. This alone should make people reconsider the statements of US officials and their allies about having concerns for the Syrian people merely on the basis of humanitarianism and democracy.

NOTES

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