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Israel and ISIS: Needed, a Thorough Accounting

By Norman Pollack
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The tangled web of political alignments in the Middle East appears to have obscured possible connections between Israel and ISIS, so opposite in religious belief systems yet sharing a basic geopolitical framework of realpolitik in identifying their respective enemies. The adage of the enemy of my enemy is my friend, though not historically perfect, may apply here, centered on a common purpose of displacing the Assad government in Syria and, to that end, drawing in the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar to sanctify the marriage of convenience. Israel has been noticeably quiet about mounting opposition to ISIS (ditto, ISIS with respect to Israel), and shares with the anti-Assad coalition clear hostility toward both Iran and Russia, Assad's chief backers. If this were all, circumstantial/conjectural reasons at best, there would be no need to proceed. Yet one is suspicious when it is seen that the Israeli Air Force has been engaged in bombing raids in

Syria in support of the Free Syrian Army and the Al Nusra Front against Assad, as part of the pool of opposition. Too, reports have surfaced of Israeli Defense Force personnel joining with ISIS units (revealed with the capture of an IDF colonel by the Iraqi Army) on the Salahuddin front.

The evidence is scattered, although an ominous picture now emerges. One sees assorted rebel forces, backed by the US and others, which have created a Salafist Principality in eastern Syria, ISIS territory today, that poses a direct threat to Assad. Additionally, Hezbollah is fighting on the side of the Syrian Army against ISIS, reason enough for Israel to oppose Iran, Hezbollah's sponsor, and Assad. Here the UN Disengagement and Observer Force (UNDOF) stationed on the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria has reported seeing that Israel has worked closely with the Al Nusra Front. Also suspicious is the US position, which has been to insist on Assad's removal before the fight with ISIS, an embarrassing position because Russia's involvement with pushing back and destroying ISIS has made America turn reluctantly to cooperate with Russia and temporarily deemphasize regime change. Through all of this, we still do not know why the US is so opposed to Assad, except that in fact Syria is seen by American policymakers as a pawn in the larger game, renewal of the Cold War, directed first against Russia, but with China perhaps the primary target once Russia is isolated, weakened, and compelled to accept an international order founded on US-defined and -controlled financial-industrial-commercial organization, with China being the next stop, to the same end, in America's unilateral status as undisputed global leader.

The stakes are high, as they always are when a militarily powerful nation chooses to operate on the falling-domino theory—push on or go under, granted, an opportunistic psychology, but one that justifies each intervention, each covert action, each regime change (all of which is sincerely believed in the exotic ideological cocktail of fusing ethnocentrism and hegemony inscribed in the mental-set of advanced capitalism) as vital to expansion of the developmental process, an underwriting of military supremacy, and full realization of exceptionalism as befits the national destiny. If not Syria, then someplace else, wherever the planets are in alignment for forcing the confrontation, in this case, ideal for the employment of global force, the EU and NATO arrayed solidly at the Russian border, and the longer-term maneuver to encircle and isolate China as America does for Asia what it has already succeeded in doing for Europe, possess the right to unrestrained market-and-investment penetration backed by the military pivot and multiparty trade agreement. TPP carried on the wings of the aircraft carrier battle groups, just as similar arrangements have been activated and enlivened by NATO: the militarization of capitalism as America's solution to the falling (political-economic) domino theory.

But where do Israel and ISIS come into the picture? Israel is America's talisman; it acts like a charm in bringing America into the center of global rivalries, its defense the gold standard for legitimating intervention, not only in the Middle East but preparing the world for America's role as the supreme architect of counterrevolution. Israel, our lucky charm, confirms by our defense of its existence, US omnipotence in world politics, magnified by the fact if any nation does not deserve protection, in light of its record of ethnic cleansing, subjugation of an occupied people and land, and support of regimes having poor human rights records, makes it an international tough sell thus adding to America's prestige as a force to be reckoned with. If Israel did not exist, America would have had to invent it (paraphrase of Sartre), so well does it reproduce in

microcosm America's own character traits of arrogance, cynicism, hardness. What then of ISIS? It as well is a blessing to American foreign policy, which is why the US has been halfhearted in its eradication. The more repulsive, as in beheadings, the more salutary from the standpoint of massive surveillance at home, the engineering of a crisis atmosphere (to the sacrifice of civil liberties), the internalization of fear, which shifts the political spectrum still further rightward, as in heightened patriotism, anti-immigrant feelings, a trivialization of politics because so much of public policy is placed off limits. An inane marching in lockstep to consumerism and paralysis on issues that matter, from war to the environment to public health to democratization of the political economy.

ISIS is welcome news for habituating the populace to social control. Foreign policy, however, is the chef d'oeuvre, in the eyes of American policymakers, in regards to usefulness. For the entire enterprise of counterterrorism, from which all things repressive is possible, requires just such a terrifying social menace (not that I underestimate its power, viciousness, and imperative need to be combatted) to be effective, and what we find, rather than a straightforward effort at ISIS's riddance, is instead the selective elimination of whomever we declare to be enemies, under the rubric of counterterrorism (e.g., Assad), keeping pure and undiluted the hegemonic paradigm of greatness. The US creation of ISIS may not have been deliberate, but the invasion of Iraq and the US presence in the Middle East (just as earlier, in Afghanistan, with respect to the Taliban), certainly was a major contributing factor. Once ISIS is finally dislodged, probably through forces other than the US and Israel, there will be others of like character, because the breeding ground of international exploitation will not have ceased. Fanaticism feeds on oppression, something the oppressor is ever loathe to admit.