

Since it Failed in Syria, America Now Targets Hezbollah

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After Hezbollah intervened in Syria, cursory analysis began circulating that the Iranians had ordered their Lebanese partners to intervene as a means of helping the government in Damascus as part of a new Iranian surge inside Syria. This stance refused to admit that Hezbollah is one of the main targets of the war in Syria or to acknowledge that Hezbollah itself intervened in Syria on the basis of its own security interests and the ongoing attack against the Lebanese towns on the Lebanese-Syrian border. The war was literally going to be brought to Hezbollah and the same forces trying to topple the Syrian government were already preparing the brinkmanship for an attack on Lebanon through a series of false claims against Hezbollah and measures that were meant to instigate fighting with it in Lebanon.

Following Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, the US government began targeting the Lebanese party with financial sanctions. Four Lebanese businessmen in the West African countries of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), the Republic of the Gambia, the Republic of Senegal, and the Republic of Sierra Leone would be accused of being informal Hezbollah envoys and thus have US sanctions imposed on them. In lockstep with Washington, the regimes of the Arab petro-sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates would start closing the businesses of Lebanese citizens, revoking their residencies, and then expelling them from their homes.

Although the prejudiced expulsion of Lebanese citizens is not necessarily a new policy among the Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf, there is a new prerogative tied to the conflict in the Levant. While newswires like *Reuters* have claimed that «the expulsions illustrate how the war in Syria has encouraged age-old tensions between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims to spread across its borders and through the region,» the truth is something else altogether. Such narratives are camouflage that aims to hide the real political nature of the conflict through some type of constructed naturalist explanations that talks about the Sunnis and Shiites as natural blood enemies. Hezbollah's Shiite character is irreverent. What the US and its allies are trying to do is tighten the noose around Hezbollah and cut off any potential sources of financial aid it receives either directly or indirectly through donations or remittances to Lebanon.

Has the EU provided Legal Cover for Renewed Israeli Aggression against Lebanon?

On July 25, 2013 the European Union added the military wing of Hezbollah to its list of terrorist organizations. The EU decision was the result of a compromise that was meant to

end the intense pressure from the US and Israeli governments. In these efforts, Israel and the US were aided by the support lobbied by the governments of Britain and the Netherlands. Although the European Union's decision was officially based on the unproven claims that Hezbollah was responsible for a terrorist attack in Bulgaria on a bus with Israeli tourists, the real reason was the legally unrelated Hezbollah intervention in Syria. The EU could have blacklisted Hezbollah much earlier if it believed the terrorism charges were justified. Even the Bulgarian government rejected them and refused to bow down to Tel Aviv's instant demands that Bulgaria name Hezbollah as the culprit.

It is worth noting that the blacklisting of Hezbollah's military wing by the EU partially satisfies the US and Israel. Since nothing is really known about Hezbollah's military wing, little can practically be done. The way the EU blacklisted Hezbollah leaves the door open potentially for a flexible position among the European Union's members and for the European Commission. Yet, it is a two-edged sword. The EU decision, however, could potentially be used as a political, legal, and economic weapon against Lebanon and Hezbollah when needed.

As a response to the European Union's action, Hezbollah's leaders in Lebanon have said that the European Union is now an accomplice in any future Israeli crimes against Lebanon. According to Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, the member states of the European Union will be responsible for a future Israeli attack on Lebanon, because they have given an EU legal cover to Israel for its next attack on Lebanon. What this means is that the Israelis will attack Lebanon and claim that they are fighting international terrorism. Undoubtedly Tel Aviv will parade the EU's 2013 decision and mention it incessantly in its talking points as a means of convincing the international public that Israel is fighting Hezbollah as part of a fight against terrorism.

Ratcheting up the Propaganda in the Media War

Reuters took the unusual step of publishing a news article on July 21, 2013 that was basically a speculative opinion piece with the title of «Insight: By relying on Iran, Syria's Assad risks irrelevance.» The opening statement is as follows: «Military support from Iran and its Shi'ite ally Hezbollah has given Syrian President Bashar al-Assad new impetus in his fight against the insurgents intent on ousting him, but at a price.» The *Reuters* article next goes on to suggest the following: «Assad now risks losing much of his autonomy to Tehran and becoming a pawn in a wider sectarian war between Sunni Muslims and Shi'ites that may not end even if he is forced to step down, military experts and diplomats in the region say.»

Business Insider would echo the position of *Reuters* by writing on July 24, 2013 that «Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been forced gradually to cede power to Iran to prop up his regime during the grinding conflict in Syria.» The above arguments are part of the standard propaganda talking points that started circulating in the sectors of the mainstream media that serve the foreign policy agenda of Washington. The aim is to naturalize the idea that sectarian hate exists among Muslims.

The propaganda talking points also include fabricated and exaggerated suggestions that the popularity of Hezbollah has declined regionally and even among its own Lebanese constituents in the Shiite community. For example, the *Voice of America* wrote thus on July 25, 2013: «Families of the hundreds of Hezbollah fighters killed in the recent battle for Qusair wonder why their loved ones died fighting other Arabs instead of Israel.» Even earlier

another *Reuters* article wrote the following on July 5, 2013: «Many Lebanese see Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's support for Assad against an insurgency dominated by Syria's Sunni majority as a miscalculation that will drag Lebanon into the Syrian quagmire, exacerbate fighting in Lebanon itself and deepen Sunni-Shi'ite sectarian rifts in the region.» The rocket attacks on Lebanon by the insurgents in Syria and the targeting of Lebanese remittances are also part of these talking points.

In all this propaganda, the success of the Syrian military has deliberately been downplayed. Instead the emphasis is that Iran, Hezbollah, and the volunteer groups from Iraq are winning the war for the Syrian government. For example, AFP wrote: «To help achieve this goal, the [Syrian] army is being backed by local militiamen operating in their own towns and villages and who have been trained in street warfare for several months in Iran and Russia, according to experts and sources close to Syria's security forces.» This aspect of the talking points is actually old and has been used to explain why the Syrian government has not collapsed like the US and its allies have wrongly predicted.

There are even more examples. *The Washington Post* would report on June 1, 2013 that «sophisticated technology from Russia and Iran has given Syrian government troops new advantages in tracking and destroying their foes, helping them solidify battlefield gains against rebels, according to Middle Eastern intelligence officials and analysts.» It would further add: «The technology includes increased numbers of Iranian-made surveillance drones and, in some areas, anti-mortar systems similar to those used by [the Pentagon] to trace the source of mortar fire, the officials and experts said. Syrian military units also are making greater use of monitoring equipment to gather intelligence about rebel positions and jamming devices to block rebel communications, they said.» The Fox News Network would follow suit by reporting that «Syrian troops are now using sophisticated technology and tactics» coming from Iran and Russia. John Bolton, the highly unpopular former US ambassador to the United Nations, would weigh in on the Syrian conflict by telling Fox News that «within the last several months there seems to me to be little doubt but that Iran and Russia have both stepped up the quantity and quality of the assistance that they're providing; more sophisticated communications and targeting capabilities, more financial assistance, and bringing in Hezbollah» in a June 2 interview with Eric Shawn.

Perhaps the worst dimension of these talking points that are being used to manufacture a false picture of the events in Syria is the one that claims that the Syrian government and its allies wants to divide Syria into multiple sectarian states. *The Guardian* would even claim, in an article by Martin Chulov and Mona Mahmood, on July 22, 2013 that the Syrian government approached «the former Israeli foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, late last year [in 2012] with a request that Israel not stand in the way of attempts to form an Alawite state, which could have meant moving some displaced communities into the Golan Heights area.» The same article writes: «'There have been obvious examples of denominational cleansing in different areas in Homs,' said local activist, Abu Rami. 'It is denominational cleansing; part of a major Iranian Shia plan, which is obvious through the involvement of Hezbollah and Iranian militias. And it's also part of Assad's personal Alawite state project.'» The situation is the exact opposite in reality, it is the Israelis and their allies that want to divide Syria into a patchwork of smaller states. These objectives are now dishonestly and fancifully being attributed to the Syrian government as its goal.

Are Israeli-Palestinian Peace Talks Tied to Israeli-US War Plans?

While some have described the renewed US-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian peace talks as an

Israeli concession or exchange with the US in return for the American pressure that forced the EU into blacklisting Hezbollah's military wing, the matter needs careful scrutiny. The Israeli-Palestinian talks have been scripted for reasons that are really tied to public relations and international diplomacy. The morally bankrupt Palestinian Authority is attending the peace talks because it was ordered to attend. Despite the cover being provided by the Israeli pledge to free a large number of Palestinian prisoners that have been held in Israeli prisoners, the Israeli government will not give it any major concessions whatsoever.

The timing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is tied to the US and Israeli agenda in the Levant. The announcement of the renewal of talks between the Israelis and the corrupt Palestinian Authority comes in close step with the EU's decision to list Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization. Now that Hezbollah is openly supporting the Syrian government, the US and Israel could be planning on attacking it in some form or another. Another Israeli conflict with Lebanon, especially in the shape of a war, would be met with great international outrage and come at a high cost to Israel's already tattered international image. Such an Israeli war on Lebanon would become a public relations disaster for Tel Aviv. This is why the renewed talks with the Palestinians could perhaps be a means of portraying Israel in a positive light before it gets involved in a new conflict with the Lebanese or any new regional adventures.

Regardless of the intentions behind the Israeli-Palestinians talks, Hezbollah is undeniably being targeted by the US and its allies. Such targeting does not necessarily mean a third Israeli war against Lebanon. Stoking the fires of sectarianism in Lebanon with the intentions of starting a civil war could be the main and best Israeli-US option. The terrorist attack on the neighbourhood of Bir Al-Abed, deep within Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut's southern suburb of Dahiyeh, and covert support for violent groups, such as that of Sheikh Ahmed Al-Assir of Sidon which fought the Lebanese military, are all part of the strategy to tighten the noose around Hezbollah by setting its home turf ablaze with fire.

US sanctions, the choking of remittances to Lebanon, and the demonization of Hezbollah by designating its military wing as a terrorist organization are part of this campaign. More moves are to come. Writing for Fox News on July 23, 2013, Claudia Rosett and Benjamin Weinthal would rhetorically ask, as their article's title suggests, «Where are the UN sanctions on Hezbollah?»

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