

Syria: A False Flag Operation Thwarted?

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An organised expose by the Syrian and Russian governments over a 3 day period starting 27th August may have thwarted a British backed plan to stage a “false flag” chemical weapons attack in Idlib province that would have forced the US to launch a missile and air assault on Syria.

According to Russian Defence Ministry spokesperson, **Igor Konashenkov**, a militant group [affiliated to al Qaeda] , Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, was going to be the conduit for this false flag operation. It would foment an attack targeting innocent citizens of Idlib and then put the blame upon the Syrian government. Eight chlorine tanks were delivered to Jisr al-Shughur town for this purpose. Militants “trained in handling poisonous substances under the supervision of specialists from the private British military company Oliva arrived in the town a day earlier. The militants had the task of simulating the rescue of the victims of the chemical weapons attack dressed in the clothes of the famous White Helmets.” Konashenkov accused British special services of being “actively involved “in the “provocation” which will “serve as another reason for the US, the UK and France to hit Syrian government targets with air strikes.”

False flag operations of this sort have happened a number of times before in Syria. In April 2018, the White Helmets staged such an operation as admitted by some of the so-called “victims” themselves. A year before that, in April 2017, a fake chemical attack became the excuse for US missile strikes against Syrian military installations in Syayrat Airbase It will be recalled that in August 2013, a fabricated chemical weapons attack was the rationale for a full-scale military assault on Syria ordered by President Barack Obama which was averted at the eleventh hour partly because of the mobilisation of mass public opinion and partly because of some sane voices in the top brass of the US military itself.

The 2013 episode like other false flag operations in Syria from 2011 to the end of 2016 had a singular underlying goal: the ouster of **President Bashar al-Assad**. Whatever the justifications provided, there was a convergence of motives among those who sought Bashar’s overthrow. For the leaders of the US, Britain, France and Israel, Bashar especially through his links with Iran and Hezbollah was a formidable obstacle to their agenda for hegemonic control over West Asia.

For the Saudi political elite it was his association with Iran — the elite’s rival for regional influence — that was the problem. For the Saudi religious elite, on the other hand, what was unacceptable was Bashar’s affiliation to a minor Shia sub-sect. The Qatari elite was incensed

by Bashar's opposition to the construction of a massive inter-state gas pipe-line starting from the tiny state that would have had far-reaching geo-economic and geopolitical consequences. The elite in Ankara with its connection to the Muslim Brotherhood failed to persuade Bashar to incorporate Brotherhood elements and ideology into Damascus's governing power structure. For all these different reasons, Bashar became the common target for regime change.

But by early 2017 it was clear that Bashar could not be ousted. Apart from the solid support of a wide spectrum of his own society, he has the backing of Russia, Iran and the Hezbollah. He has now regained control of most of Syria. The militants, whose acts of terror have alienated the vast majority of Syrians, are totally isolated. Besides, Donald Trump who assumed the US presidency in January 2017 is not interested in regime change in Syria. In fact, now that the militants have been vanquished he is more inclined towards withdrawing from Syria. There are indications that he wants to work with Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to restore peace and stability in Syria.

This is anathema to the 'Deep State' in the US. Cooperating with Putin or withdrawing from Syria, from the perspective of those elements in the intelligence and security services, the military, the Congress, the media, some of the lobbies and special interest groups that constitute the Deep State, would spell the end of US hegemony and dominance of West Asia. For the advocates of hegemony, it means surrendering to Russia whose power and influence in the region is growing. It would also facilitate the entrenchment of Iranian and Hezbollah influence in Syria. This, the Deep State argues, will weaken Israel's position and increase its vulnerability. US's other allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia, other Gulf monarchies, Egypt and Jordan will also feel threatened. It explains why Deep State elements are insisting that the US retains a foothold in Syria.

It is in this context that Idlib assumes added significance. The British plan to launch a "false flag" chemical weapons attack may yet happen. And it may yet lead to a US helmed assault upon Syria.

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