

Syria: Terrorism As A Weapon

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The terror groups operating in the country have been lavishly funded and trained by Saudi Arabia and Qatar and also by Turkey and the U.S., two North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, speaking after the rebels had briefly seized two border crossings and massacred the soldiers manning the posts, said that cooperation with the armed rebels should increase. Iraqi Deputy Interior Minister Adnan al Assadi told the media that the Turkey-based Free Syrian Army (FSA) "executed 22 Syrian soldiers in front of the eyes of Iraqi soldiers" after they briefly overran a border post at Abu Kamal, in eastern Syria, close to Iraq, in the third week of July.

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July became one of the bloodiest months for Syria as the foreign-backed armed groups made a concerted attempt to further destabilise the government led by Bashar al Assad. The terror attack on July 18, which claimed the lives of Defence Minister Dawoud Rahja and three senior officials (Assef Shawkat, deputy head of the Syrian Army and brother-in-law of Bashar al Assad; Hassan Turkmani, Chief of Crisis Operations; and Hisham Bakhtiar, head of Intelligence) who were in the forefront of the security drive to clear the armed groups from their strongholds, was indeed a serious blow to the government. The fact that the bombing occurred in the National Security Building where meetings are often chaired by the President himself is a serious cause for alarm as it could not have happened without the help of hostile foreign powers.

The Turkish newspaper Habberturk reported that Israeli Intelligence played an important role in the attack. It quoted an unidentified former American intelligence analyst as saying that the "entire attack smelled of Mossad". Israeli President Shimon Peres has publicly stated that he wants the Syrian government to collapse. If a pro-Western government is installed in Damascus, then Israel can turn its full attention to Hizbollah, and the United States can focus on regime change in Iran.

The Syrian government said that foreign powers were behind the attack and named "Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel" as the countries responsible for the act of terror. A Reuters report in the last week of July said that a secret base located in Adana province near Turkey's border with Syria was the "nerve centre" from where operations to topple the government in Damascus were being launched. The U.S' military base of Incirlik is also based in Adana.

The leaders of the countries ranged against Syria virtually applauded the terror attack. The U.S. State Department spokesman, while saying that Washington was against further

bloodshed in Syria, “noted” that those killed and injured “were key architects of the Assad regime’s assault on the Syrian people”. A palpable regret could be noticed in the statements issued by some governments that the primary target of the bombing – the President – was not among the casualties. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov described the American reaction to the Damascus blasts “as a direct endorsement of terrorism”. He said that the position Washington had adopted was “a sinister one”.

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According to reports, most FSA commanders are Iraqi Sunnis. A series of terror attacks had taken place in the Shia-dominated areas in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities in July. It is not surprising that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Malki has refused to endorse the Arab League’s call to Bashar al Assad to step down. The Iraqi government has obviously drawn a parallel with what is happening across its borders to the recent terror attacks in Iraq. Many of the Iraqi “jihadis” have transformed themselves into Syrian freedom fighters.

It is estimated that more than a hundred armed groups are operating in the urban areas of the country. The U.S. media have finally acknowledged that Al Qaeda and Salafist fighters who infiltrated from the neighbouring countries were responsible for the spectacular suicide bombings and sectarian attacks. Randa Kassis, one of the leading figures of the FSA, told the German magazine Der Spiegel that “the Islamist groups, which are superbly financed and equipped by the Gulf states, are ruthlessly seizing decision-making power for themselves”. Muslim clerics in many Arab countries are urging young people to turn Syria into another Afghanistan. German intelligence has estimated that around 90 per cent of the armed insurgents owe their allegiance to Al Qaeda. A recent Time magazine report said that Al Qaeda flags dominate in rural areas currently occupied by the armed groups.

U.N. CHARTER

Immediately after the Damascus terror attack, Washington and its allies started piling pressure on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to invoke Chapter Seven of the U.N. Charter, which allows the use of outside military force against Syria. It was the third time in nine months that the U.S. and its allies tried to force a resolution on Syria. Russia and China once again vetoed the resolution. South Africa (a member of BRICS, an association of the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and Pakistan chose to abstain. But India, which currently occupies a seat in the UNSC, once again voted with the West. Russia and China have remained steadfast on the side of the beleaguered Syrian government even as traditional friends such as India have virtually deserted it in its time of need.

South Africa, in fact, criticised the one-sided nature of the draft resolution. India, which had chosen to abstain on the crucial resolution which led to outside military intervention in Libya last year, changed its stance in the case of Syria. New Delhi has been consistently siding

with the West and the Sunni Arab monarchies on issues ranging from Libya to Iran. The BRICS countries are supposed to present a united front on crucial foreign policy issues. The final declaration issued at the 2012 BRICS summit held in New Delhi in March, stressed the need for cohesiveness while voting on important political issues in international forums.

Vitaly Churkin, the Russian Ambassador to the U.N., accused the Western members of the U.N. of attempting “to fan the flames of confrontation in the Security Council”. He said that the draft resolution on Syria, which was put to vote, was “biased”, adding that “the threat of sanctions was exclusively aimed at the government of Syria, and does not reflect the reality of the country today. It is especially ambiguous in the light of what happened with the grave terrorist attack that took place in Damascus.”

The Russian Foreign Minister said in Moscow that the position of the West in practical terms meant that they “are going to support such acts of terrorism until the UNSC acts on their demands”. He emphasised that the West was not interested in solving the crisis in Syria, which had been dragging on for more than a year, in a collective manner. The resolution presented in the UNSC made no mention of the terror groups inside Syria being backed by outside forces. Nor was there any suggestion from the West and its allies about stopping support for the armed militants fighting the Syrian government.

The rebels in Syria know fully well that without outside intervention they will never be able to defeat the Syrian Army. The Security Council had invoked Chapter Seven against Libya last year, following which the West immediately started a bombing campaign and openly trained and armed the anti-government militias there. The result was more bloodshed and carnage. The goal of regime change was achieved, but instability in the region only increased, with civil war engulfing neighbouring Mali and militant groups, armed with weapons looted from Libya, creating havoc even in countries such as Nigeria. Libya itself is in danger of being balkanised, with the eastern part threatening to secede.

Washington was also not keen to extend the terms of the Kofi Annan-led Peace Mission to Syria. China, along with India, wanted to give the mission another 45 days. A compromise was finally reached on July 20, extending the mission by another 30 days with the possibility of a further extension provided there was a cessation of the use of heavy weapons. The tactics of the armed groups is to occupy sections of cities and towns, leaving the government with little option but to drive them away using heavy artillery at times. This happened in Damascus in late July. When the rebels were driven out of Damascus, they opened up another front in a section of Aleppo, the largest city in the country. Washington, which anyway was never too enamoured of the Annan plan, wants to give it a formal burial after the latest extension.

The Barack Obama administration knows fully well that the rebels it is arming and financing will keep on fighting and the Syrian state will respond to preserve law and order. The pliant media under its control will pin all the atrocities happening in the country on the government or groups supporting it. The veteran German war correspondent Jurgen Todenhofen, writing in the widely circulated newspaper Bild, accused the rebels of “deliberately killing civilians and then presenting them as victims of the government”. He described this “massacre marketing strategy” as being “among the most disgusting things I have ever experienced in an armed conflict”.

The Syrian government seems determined to ride out the maelstrom currently buffeting it. Besides diplomatic support from Russia and China, Syria is also assured of military backing

from traditional allies such as Iran. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al Muallem was in Teheran on an unscheduled visit at the end of July. He said in Teheran that the bulk of the anti-government fighters were now staging a last-ditch fight in Aleppo. "They will definitely be defeated," he told a joint press conference along with his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Salehi. Muallem said that his country "is a target of a global plot whose agents are in this region". Salehi warned about the adverse consequences for the entire region if the Bashar al Assad government was ousted by force. He said that the consequences "would engulf the region and eventually the entire world".

Iran's Vice-President in charge of international affairs, Ali Saeedlou, told a visiting Syrian delegation in the last week of July that his country was ready to share its "experience and capabilities with the brother nation of Syria". In the same week, General Massoud Jazayeri said that Syria had friends in the region who were ready to "strike out". He was probably referring to the Hizbollah in Lebanon. The Hizbollah leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, in an important speech delivered in the third week of July to commemorate the 2006 war against an Israeli invasion force in Lebanon, said that "Syria is a genuine problem for the U.S. and Israel" because it is "a linking bridge between Iran and the resistance and, in better words, the principal supporter of the resistance at a special military level".

He went on to say that it was Syria's help that proved crucial in its victory against the Israeli forces. He said that Syria gave most of the arms and missiles to the resistance forces during the 33-day war in 2006. Nasrallah blamed the West for sponsoring terrorist activities in Syria and blocking a national dialogue. He said the main reason why the U.S. was trying to destabilise Syria was the country's support for the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance against Israel, "the gendarme of the region". Almost on cue, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the U.S. media that his government was ready to take military action against Syria to prevent chemical weapons from falling into the hands "of Hizbollah and other terror groups". U.S. and Israeli officials are now citing the pretext of "chemical weapons" to intervene militarily in Syria. The U.S. had used the non-existent threat of weapons of mass destruction as a ruse to invade Iraq in 2003.

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