

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

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With foresight and analysis, this incisive article written more than three years ago in January 2013 provides an understanding of unfolding events in Syria.

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.

- [3] Nour Malas and Jay Solomon, "Syria Would Cut Iran Military Tie, Opposition Head Says," *Wall Street Journal*, December 2, 2011.
- [4] WikiLeaks, "Re: INSIGHT - military intervention in Syria, post withdrawal status of forces," October 19, 2012: <http://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/209688_re-insight-military-intervention-in-syria-post-withdrawal.html>.
- [5] *Ibid.*
- [6] Lauren Williams, "13 French officers being held in Syria," *The Daily Star*, March 5, 2012.
- [7] *Ibid.*
- [8] Israa Al-Fass, "Mossad, Blackwater, CIA Led Operations in Homs," trans. Sara Taha Moughnieh, *Al-Manar*, March 3, 2012.
- [9] David Ignatius, "Looking for a Syrian endgame," *The Washington Post*, July 18, 2012.
- [10] Dan Williams, "Israel accuses Syria of genocide, urges intervention," Andrew Heavens ed., *Reuters*, June 10, 2012.
- [11] Hassan Shaalan, "Israeli fighting Assad 'can't go home,'" *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 3, 2013.
- [12] Rafael D. Frankel, "Keeping Hamas and Hezbollah Out of a War with Iran," *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Fall 2012): pp.53-65.
- [13] *Ibid.*
- [14] "Weakened Syria unlikely to join Iran in war against Israel: report," *The Daily Star*, January 4, 2013.
- [15] *Ibid.*
- [16] Damien McElroy and Robert Tait, "Syria 'would not join Iran in war against Israel,'" *The Daily Telegraph*, January 3, 2013.
- [17] "Weakened Syria," *The Daily Star*, *op. cit.*
- [18] "Syria and Hezbollah won't join the fight if Israel strikes Iran, top-level report predicts," *Times of Israel*, January 3, 2013.
- [19] McElroy and Tait, "Syria would not," *op. cit.*
- [20] Lauren Williams, "New Egypt warms up to Hezbollah: ambassador," *The Daily Star*, December 29, 2011.
- [21] Hassan Mneimneh, "Lebanon — The Christians of Hezbollah: A Foray into a Disconnected Political Narrative," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, November 16, 2012.
- [22] Hilary Leila Krieger, "Israel to join NATO activities amidst Turkey tension," *Jerusalem*

Post, December 23, 2012; Jonathon Burch and Gulsen Solaker, "Turkey lifts objection to NATO cooperation with Israel," Mark Heinrich ed., *Reuters*, December 24, 2012; "Turkey: Israel's participation in NATO not related to Patriots," *Today's Zaman*, December 28, 2012.

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