

“Islamic Terrorists” supported by Uncle Sam: Bush Administration “Black Ops” directed against Iran, Lebanon and Syria

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Global Research, May 31, 2007
31 May 2007

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Intelligence, Terrorism](#)
In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?,
THE WAR ON LEBANON](#)

The Bush administration has admitted that covert actions of an aggressive nature were applied against Iran and Syria. The stated objective was to wreck the countries' economies and currency systems. The infamous Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group (ISOG) created in early 2006, integrated by officials from the White House, the State Department, the CIA and the Treasury Department, had a mandate to destabilize Syria and Iran, and bring about “Regime Change” :

“The committee, the Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group [ISOG], met weekly throughout much of 2006 to coordinate actions such as curtailing Iran's access to credit and banking institutions, organizing the sale of military equipment to Iran's neighbors and supporting forces that oppose the two regimes.” (Boston Globe, 25 May 2007)

ISOG had also been providing undercover assistance to Iranian opposition groups and dissidents. The group's propaganda ploy consisted in feeding disinformation into the news chain and “building international outrage toward Iran”. (Boston Globe 2, January 2007)

About-Turn in Iran-Syria Policy?

Washington has recently announced an apparent about-turn: no more treacherous covert ops directed against “rogue enemies” in the Middle East. The Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group (ISOG) has been disbanded on the orders of President Bush. The US will no longer be involved in “[covert] aggressive actions against Iran and Syria”, according to State Department officials.

“The group had become the focus for administration critics who feared that it was plotting covert actions that could escalate into a military conflict with Iran or Syria. The air of secrecy surrounding the group when it was established in March 2006, coupled with the fact that it was modeled after a similar special committee on Iraq, contributed to those suspicions.

A senior State Department official,... said the group [ISOG] was shut down because of a widespread public perception that it was designed to enact regime change. State Department officials have said the focus of the Iran-Syria group was persuading the two regimes to change their behavior, not toppling them.” (Ibid)

Believe it or not?

Foreign policy analysts have described Washington's decision as proof of a welcome "softening" of US strategy in the Middle East. The Bush administration is said to have discarded "regime change" in favor of a more flexible approach, consisting of constructive dialogue with Tehran and Damascus. Aggressive covert actions, we are told, have been swapped for bona fide international diplomacy:

The [dissolution of ISOG] comes as the Bush administration has embarked on a significant new effort to hold high-level meetings with Iran and Syria.

...

Shortly before the Iran-Syria group was shut down, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice launched a major initiative to engage Iran and Syria in a regional effort to stabilize Iraq, reversing longstanding U.S. policy against high-level contact with the countries.

For years, the Bush administration has shunned meetings with Syria. ...But Rice met this month with Syria's foreign minister in Egypt, the first such high-level meeting between the two countries since 2004, and on Monday, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, is scheduled to meet his Iranian counterpart in Baghdad.

Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East specialist at the Congressional Research Service, the research arm of the U.S. Congress, said he did not think it was a coincidence that the Iran-Syria group was disbanded at the same time the State Department began its diplomatic outreach.

"I think the rationale for that group was promoting regime change, and Rice is going in a much different direction from that," Katzman said. "The regime-change school within the administration has really gotten quite a bit weaker." (Ibid)

The decision to dismantle ISOG is largely cosmetic. Most of these intelligence operations remain intact. ISOG was one among several covert initiatives to destabilize Iran and Syria. Regime change and outright war are still part of the Administration's agenda. In fact, destabilizing covert intelligence operations directed against Iran and Syria have been stepped up in the course of the last four years. Moreover, these operations are closely coordinated with Israeli and NATO war plans, which constitute an integral part of the US sponsored military operation directed against Iran, Syria and Lebanon.

The covert ops have been synchronized with the military road map, including the various US war scenarios envisaged since the launching of "Theater Iran Near Term" (TIRANNT) in May 2003, barely a month after the invasion of Iraq. These war-like scenarios explicitly envisage regime change:

... Under TIRANNT, Army and U.S. Central Command planners have been examining both near-term and out-year scenarios for war with Iran, including all aspects of a major combat operation, from mobilization and deployment of forces through postwar stability operations after regime change." (William Arkin, Washington Post, 16 April 2006)

The US is on a war footing and the various covert operations and Psy-Ops -which routinely feed despicable images of the Iranian head of State into the news chain-, are an integral part of the military-intelligence and propaganda arsenal.

In turn, the covert ops are coordinated with US, Israeli and NATO military deployments in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf including the conduct of major war games, which have been carried out almost continuously since Summer 2006.

CIA " Black Ops" directed against Iran

Coinciding with the announcement on the closing down of ISOG, "The CIA has received secret presidential approval to mount a covert "black" operation to destabilize the Iranian government, according to current and former officials in the intelligence community... " ([ABC News Report 22 May 2007](#)). This parallel CIA sponsored initiative, which "received approval by White House officials and other officials in the intelligence community", has broadly the same mandate as that of the defunct ISOG:

"The sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the subject, say President Bush has signed a "nonlethal presidential finding" that puts into motion a CIA plan that reportedly includes a coordinated campaign of propaganda, disinformation and manipulation of Iran's currency and international financial transactions.

"I can't confirm or deny whether such a program exists or whether the president signed it, but it would be consistent with an overall American approach trying to find ways to put pressure on the regime," said Bruce Riedel, a recently retired CIA senior official who dealt with Iran and other countries in the region.

A National Security Council spokesperson, Gordon Johndroe, said, "The White House does not comment on intelligence matters." A CIA spokesperson said, "As a matter of course, we do not comment on allegations of covert activity." ([ABC News Report 22 May 2007](#))

The CIA plan was apparently "designed to pressure Iran to stop its nuclear enrichment program and end aid to insurgents in Iraq." The covert operation, according to US officials, was a softer alternative to that of a military strike on Iran, an option which was favored by Vice President Dick Cheney and other hawks within the administration:

"Current and former intelligence officials say the approval of the covert action means the Bush administration, for the time being, has decided not to pursue a military option against Iran.

"Vice President Cheney helped to lead the side favoring a military strike," said former CIA official Riedel, "but I think they have come to the conclusion that a military strike has more downsides than upsides." (Ibid)

The covert intelligence operations directed against Iran and Syria is not an alternative to military action. Quite the opposite. The CIA plan was designed to support Washington's strategy to destabilize Iran and Syria, through both military action and non-military means including covert intelligence operations.

Unleashing The Islamic Brigades Inside Iran

In relation to Iran, US intelligence has been supporting a Pakistani based terrorist group, Jundullah (Soldiers of God), that has conducted terrorist raids inside Iran. The group operates “from bases on the rugged Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan ‘tri-border region’.” According to a report by ABC News:

“A Pakistani tribal militant group responsible for a series of deadly guerrilla raids inside Iran has been secretly encouraged and advised by American officials since 2005, U.S. and Pakistani intelligence sources tell ABC News.

The group, called Jundullah, is made up of members of the Baluchi tribe and operates out of the Baluchistan province in Pakistan, just across the border from Iran.

It has taken responsibility for the deaths and kidnappings of more than a dozen Iranian soldiers and officials.” (ABC News, 2 April 2007)

Abd el Malik Regi, the leader of Jundullah, commands a force of several hundred guerrilla fighters “that stage attacks across the border into Iran on Iranian military officers, Iranian intelligence officers, kidnapping them, executing them on camera, ... Most recently, Jundullah took credit for an attack in February that killed at least 11 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard riding on a bus in the Iranian city of Zahedan.” (Ibid)

US government sources have acknowledged that Jundullah’s leader “had regular contact with US officials” but denies any “direct funding” of Jundullah by US intelligence.

Inherent in CIA covert operations, the Agency never grants funding “directly”. It invariably proceeds through one of its proxy organizations including Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), which historically, since the Soviet-Afghan war, has provided support to Islamic terror groups, including the funding of the training camps and the madrassahs, always acting on behalf of the CIA. In fact this insidious role of Pakistan’s ISI (on behalf of the the CIA) is candidly acknowledged by US intelligence:

“American intelligence sources say Jundullah has received money and weapons through the Afghanistan and Pakistan military and Pakistan’s intelligence service. Pakistan has officially denied any connection.” (Brian Ross and Christopher Isham, The Secret War Against Iran, April 03, 2007

Other channels used by US intelligence in funding terrorism is through Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, where foundation money is funneled to various militant Islamic groups on behalf of Uncle Sam. “Some former CIA officers say the arrangement [with regard to Jundullah] is reminiscent of how the U.S. government used proxy armies, funded by other countries including Saudi Arabia, to destabilize the government of Nicaragua in the 1980s [reminiscent of the Iran-Contra affair].” (Ibid)

Consistent Pattern: Historical Origins of “Islamic Terrorism”

Ironically, the Islamic groups are portrayed as working hand in glove with Tehran. Iran, a predominantly Shia country, is accused of harboring Sunni Islamic terrorists, when in fact these Islamic terrorists are “intelligence assets” of the United States, supported indirectly

by Washington.

This role of US intelligence in support of “Islamic terrorists” is well established. The covert op applied in Iran are part of a consistent pattern

The not so hidden agenda of US intelligence, applied throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, is to trigger political instability and foment ethnic strife by supporting “Islamic terrorist organizations”, ultimately with a view to weakening the Nation State and destabilizing sovereign countries.

From the onslaught of the Soviet-Afghan war and throughout the 1990s, a central feature of CIA activities has consisted in providing covert support to “Islamic terrorist organizations”:

In 1979 “the largest covert operation in the history of the CIA” was launched in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in support of the pro-Communist government of Babrak Kamal. (See Fred Halliday, “The Un-great game: the Country that lost the Cold War, Afghanistan, New Republic, 25 March 1996): Ahmed Rashid, The Taliban: Exporting Extremism, Foreign Affairs, November-December 1999. See also [Michel Chossudovsky, America’s “War on Terrorism”, Global Research, 2005, Ch. 2.](#))

With the active encouragement of the CIA and Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence, “some 35,000 Muslim radicals from 40 Islamic countries joined Afghanistan’s fight between 1982 and 1992. Tens of thousands more came to study in Pakistani madrasahs. Eventually more than 100,000 foreign Muslim radicals were directly influenced by the Afghan jihad.” (See Chossudovsky, op cit)

These covert operations in support of the “Islamic Brigades” continued in the post-Cold war period. The ISI’s extensive intelligence military-network was not dismantled in the wake of the Soviet-Afghan war. The CIA continued to support the Islamic “jihad” out of Pakistan. New undercover initiatives were set in motion in Central Asia, the Middle East and the Balkans. Pakistan’s military and intelligence apparatus essentially “served as a catalyst for the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of six new Muslim republics in Central Asia.” (Ibid). “Meanwhile, Islamic missionaries of the Wahhabi sect from Saudi Arabia established themselves in the Muslim republics of the Former Soviet Union as well as within the Russian federation encroaching upon the institutions of the secular State.” (Ibid)

A similar pattern emerged in the Balkans. Starting in the early 1990s, the Clinton Administration supported the recruitment of Al Qaeda Mujahideen to fight in Bosnia alongside the Bosnian Muslim Army. Ironically, it was the Republican Party in a document published by the Republican Party Committee of the US Senate which accused Clinton not only of a “‘hands-on’ involvement with the Islamic network’s arms pipeline” but also of collaborating with the Third World Relief Agency (TWRA), “a Sudan-based, phony humanitarian organization believed to be connected with such fixtures of the Islamic terror network as Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman (the convicted mastermind behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing) and Osama Bin Laden,... ” (The original document can be consulted on the website of the US Senate Republican Party Committee (Senator Larry Craig), at <http://www.senate.gov/~rpc/releases/1997/iran.htm>)

Since the launching of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) in the wake of September 11, 2001, many of the official documents, which single out the insidious relationship of US

intelligence to the “Islamic terror network”, have been carefully removed from the public eye.

US Sponsored “Islamic Terrorists” inside Lebanon

The recent killings of civilians in Palestinian refugee camps in northern Lebanon, resulted from the confrontation between Fatah Al Islam and the Lebanese armed forces. Fatah al-Islam is a predominantly non-Palestinian Sunni fundamentalist group, operating inside the refugee camps. Fatah Al Islam is also inspired by the Wahabi sects of Saudi Arabia, which were part of the CIA’s covert operations since the onslaught of the Soviet-Afghan war.

The Lebanese armed forces have been involved in raids on the camps, leading to the uprooting of the Palestinians refugees. The number of Fatah al Islam militants (made up of Saudi, Syrian, Yemeni and Moroccan fighters), inside the camp was of the order of 150-200 according to press reports. The Lebanese military offensive has been disproportionate, resulting in countless civilian casualties.

“Yet, the massively disproportionate assault on the camp has been unconditionally endorsed by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. “The Siniora government is fighting against a very tough extremist foe,” Rice said. “But Lebanon is doing the right thing to try to protect its population, to assert its sovereignty and so we are very supportive of the Siniora government and what it is trying to do.”

Lebanon has used the police action against this tiny group to ask the US for \$280 million in military assistance to help put down what it grandiosely calls an “uprising.” State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the request for funds, \$220 million of which would go to the Lebanese Armed Forces and another \$60 million to security forces, was being considered by Washington. The US gave \$40 million in military aid to Lebanon last year and an additional \$5 million so far this year. ([Chris Marsden, 27 May 2007](#))

Fatah Al Islam has been presented in media reports, in an utterly twisted logic, as an organization linked to the Fatah movement in Palestine, a secular organization, founded by Yaser Arafat. From an ideological standpoint, Fatah al Islam, is similar to Al Qaeda, which is known to be financed out of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States and supported by Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) in liaison with its US counterpart.

According to Seymour Hersh, Saudi Arabia is providing funding as well as covert support to Fatah Al Islam, in close consultation with the Bush administration

Hersh points to a “private agreement” between top NeoCon officials and Prince Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia, who worked closely with CIA Director George Tenet, when he was Saudi Ambassador in Washington. The Lebanese government is also involved in this intelligence operation:

“The key player is the Saudis. What I [Hersh] was writing about was sort of a private agreement that was made between the White House, we’re talking about Richard—Dick—Cheney and Elliott Abrams, one of the key aides in the White House, with Bandar [Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi national security adviser]. And the idea was to get support, covert support from the Saudis, to support various hard-line jihadists, Sunni groups, particularly in Lebanon, who would be seen in case of an actual confrontation with

Hezbollah—the Shia group in the southern Lebanon—would be seen as an asset, .as simple as that.. We’re in the business now of supporting the Sunnis anywhere we can against the Shia, against the Shia in Iran, against the Shia in Lebanon, that is Nasrullah. Civil war. We’re in a business of creating in some places, Lebanon in particular, a sectarian violence..”(CNN Interview with Seymour Hersh, CNN International’s Your World Today, 21 May 2007)

The pattern of Saudi support to Fatah Al Islam is part of a US sponsored covert operation similar to those conducted by the CIA in the 1980s in support of Al Qaeda.

Well, the United States was deeply involved. This was a covert operation that Bandar ran with us. Don’t forget, if you remember, you know, we got into the war in Afghanistan with supporting Osama bin Laden, the Mujahideen back in the late 1980s with Bandar and with people like Elliott Abrams around, the idea being that the Saudis promised us they could control — they could control the jihadists so we spent a lot of money and time, ... in the late 1980s using and supporting the jihadists... And we have the same pattern, ... using the Saudis again to support jihadists [Fatah Al Islam], Saudis assuring us they can control these various group, the groups like the one that is in contact right now in Tripoli with the government. (CNN Interview with Seymour Hersh, CNN International’s Your World Today, 21 May 2007)

Staged Event in Lebanon? Building a Humanitarian Justification for Military Intervention

Fatah Al Islam is an “intelligence asset” financed by Saudi Arabia. While the Bush administration accuses Damascus of supporting Fatah Al Islam, there are indications that the killings in the Palestinian refugee camps were the result of a carefully staged military intelligence operation..

Since the Summer 2006 following the Israeli bombing of Lebanon, NATO forces are present inside Lebanon as well as off Syrian-Lebanese coastline. The UN Security Council Resolution allowing for the deployment of NATO peace-keeping forces was the first step in this process, which followed the 2005 withdrawal and Syrian forces from Lebanon.

The objective of the military roadmap, is to create sectarian violence inside Lebanon which will provide a pretext “on humanitarian grounds” for a stepped up military intervention by NATO forces under a formal UN mandate. This humanitarian military NATO intervention in liaison with Israel, is envisaged as a sequel to the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005 and the Israeli bombings of 2006. If it were to be launched it could lead to a situation of de facto foreign occupation of Lebanon as well as the enforcement of a economic blockade directed against Syria.

The pretext for these stepped up military actions are Syria’s alleged support of Fatah Al Islam and Damascus’ supposed involvement in the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. The timely “investigation” into Hariri’s assassination and the setting up of a kangaroo court are being used by the coalition to foment anti-Syrian sentiment in Lebanon. From a military and strategic standpoint, Lebanon is the gateway into Syria. The destabilization of Lebanon supports the US-NATO-Israeli military agenda directed against Syria and Iran. US intelligence sets loose its Islamic brigades, while also accusing the enemy of sponsoring terrorist groups, which are in fact covertly supported and financed by Uncle Sam.

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