

NATO Versus Syria: NATO Clandestinely Engaged in Syrian Conflict

CIA Analysts Skeptical Regarding March to War

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Americans should be concerned about what is happening in Syria, if only because it threatens to become another undeclared war like Libya but much, much worse. Calls for regime change have come from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who several weeks ago predicted a civil war.

That is indeed likely if the largely secular and nationalist regime of Bashar al-Assad falls, pitting Sunni against Shia against Alawite. Indigenous Christians will be caught in the meat grinder. Ironically, many of the Christians in Damascus are Iraqis who experienced the last round of liberation in their own country and had to flee for their lives.

NATO is already clandestinely engaged in the Syrian conflict, with Turkey taking the lead as U.S. proxy. Ankara's foreign minister, Ahmet Davitoglu, has openly admitted that his country is prepared to invade as soon as there is agreement among the Western allies to do so. The intervention would be based on humanitarian principles, to defend the civilian population based on the "responsibility to protect" doctrine that was invoked to justify Libya. Turkish sources suggest that intervention would start with creation of a buffer zone along the Turkish-Syrian border and then be expanded. Aleppo, Syria's largest and most cosmopolitan city, would be the crown jewel targeted by liberation forces.

Unmarked NATO warplanes are arriving at Turkish military bases close to Iskenderum on the Syrian border, delivering weapons from the late Muammar Gaddafi's arsenals as well as volunteers from the Libyan Transitional National Council who are experienced in pitting local volunteers against trained soldiers, a skill they acquired confronting Gaddafi's army. Iskenderum is also the seat of the Free Syrian Army, the armed wing of the Syrian National Council. French and British special forces trainers are on the ground, assisting the Syrian rebels while the CIA and U.S. Spec Ops are providing communications equipment and intelligence to assist the rebel cause, enabling the fighters to avoid concentrations of Syrian soldiers.

CIA analysts are skeptical regarding the march to war. The frequently cited United Nations report that more than 3,500 civilians have been killed by Assad's soldiers is based largely on rebel sources and is uncorroborated. The Agency has refused to sign off on the claims. Likewise, accounts of mass defections from the Syrian Army and pitched battles between

deserters and loyal soldiers appear to be a fabrication, with few defections being confirmed independently. Syrian government claims that it is being assaulted by rebels who are armed, trained, and financed by foreign governments are more true than false.

In the United States, many friends of Israel are on the Assad regime-change bandwagon, believing that a weakened Syria, divided by civil war, will present no threat to Tel Aviv. But they should think again, as these developments have a way of turning on their head. The best organized and funded opposition political movement in Syria is the Muslim Brotherhood.

Philip Girdi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest.

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