

Syria's Endgame Could "Get Ugly": Washington's Balkanization Plan. Turkey's Military Presence in Northern Syria

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While Syrian troops carry on their liberation of Damascus' suburbs from radical militants with the support of Iranian troops and Shia militia detachments, the United States and Saudi Arabia are planning to take advantage of Ankara's tacit consent and launch a decisive blow against the forces of Bashar al-Assad. Saudi demands issued to Qatar, urging the latter to launch a military strike against Syria is just part of a multinational military operation in the making to rely on ground forces drawn from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. We face the probable entry of so-called Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia into Syrian territory, illegally occupied by the United States. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has recently expressed its readiness to send its troops to Syria within the framework of a so-called International Coalition to replace American troops deployed there acting on the request of US President Donald Trump.

It's safe to say that the plan aimed at balkanizing Syria is in full swing. From a realistic point of view, the Saudi-led forces only need to obtain consent from the US to launch an invasion, all while Washington is engaged in a variety of unnecessary political maneuvers, including holding consultations with Kurdish-led SDF forces that it has sponsored for some time now. Thus, the US is attempting to extend some form of authority to these forces as they enter US-occupied territories. While Russian forces enjoy the invitation of the legitimately recognized government in Damascus, the Pentagon has no such luxury, and therefore wants to obtain a plausible pretext by recognizing the SDF as a governmental power in the territory of eastern Syria. This means that their consent will also be a factor aimed at legitimizing the military occupation of the GCC forces.

Meanwhile, Turkish troops are also actively engaged in the formation of local self-governed bodies in the territories that Ankara occupies. And even though their structure is far more complicated than those formed by the SDF, the process is clearly moving forward, and in the foreseeable future, Turkey will also try to use the same pretext to try and justify its military presence in northern Syria as if it was acting at the request of legitimate authorities in the border areas with Turkey.

A great many Arab media sources report that consultations are being held with leaders of the SDF. As a matter of fact, representatives of the United States are indeed holding talks with the Kurdish People's Self-Defense Forces, the dominant force in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), over the nature of the future occupation of their territories by a number of Arab states on the pretext that they will be defending those lands from the almost

destroyed Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist organization, and it seems that the Kurdish leader Aldar Khalil believes that this occupation is a viable solution to the now unclear terrorist threat. However, he refused to disclose the contents of these negotiations, as well as the areas of possible deployment of Arab forces or their nationality, but he recognized them as part of the international US-led coalition. Kurdish sources would report that local militiamen had a meeting with representatives of the Arab states in Ayn Issa, a town within the Tell Abyad District of the Raqqah Governorate.

The progress made by pro-Assad forces and their Iranian allies aimed at liberating Syrian territories still held by militants are of little concern to the West and its allies, as these militants serve no direct role in future plans to occupy the edges of the Syrian state. Moreover, in the process of this liberation Syrian forces are suffering losses. On April 24, yet another attempt of breakthrough in the Yarmouk area failed, resulting in another 30 Syrian soldiers killed, including those from the elite Tiger Forces and Hezbollah, who had been redeployed to this area from Kalamoon due to the fact that Palestinians were leaving their positions en masse.

Naturally, the incursion of Arab forces will significantly strengthen the ground presence of the US-led coalition, and one is safe to assume that these Arab forces will try to push Iranian forces out of Syria and seal all land routes connecting Syria and Iran. The next phase of the war will have to be aimed at directly colliding with the Iranian proxy forces and Iranian military detachments in Syria. Amid all of this remains the coalition's ultimate goal – the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad.

Under these conditions, Russia is trying to strengthen air defense capabilities over the Syrian Arab Republic, so they can provide an adequate response to additional missile strikes that the Pentagon may launch against sensitive Syrian military infrastructure. This explains why the delivery of Russia's advanced S-300 systems to Damascus is now being discussed by everyone, and in particular by Israel. However, Israeli officials made it clear that the Israeli Air Force will only launch strikes against S-300 systems deployed in Syria if they are used to target Israeli military aircraft. But you cannot win the Syrian war with air defense systems alone. They are quite capable of significantly weakening the effectiveness of US missile and bomb strikes, but the outcome will ultimately be determined by land engagements. Additionally, if the Syrian air defense forces are going to begin intercepting America's Tomahawks and combat aircraft effectively, Washington is quite capable of bringing its entire military machine to the region, taking advantage of both its aircraft groups and the Al Udeid base in Qatar, that remains the largest in the region.

It seems that the end of the Syrian conflict is approaching. Almost all players have grown tired of it, including the US and Russia. Syria has become the strongest factor of contention amid Moscow's relations with Washington and Tel Aviv, and against the backdrop of Washington's attempts to make anti-Russian sanctions even broader, Moscow doesn't seem determined to go all in on it. Armenia and eastern Ukraine also weigh heavily on decision makers in Moscow. Everyone understands that there will be no nuclear conflict between Moscow and Washington over Syria, no matter how intense such rhetoric becomes.

As for Saudi Arabia, it still finds itself trapped in a conflict of its own making in Yemen. It also faces mounting difficulties domestically including a possible attempted military coup from within. It's clear that by pushing Qatar into the abyss that is the Syrian war, the Saudi royal family wants Syrian and Iranian forces to destroy all Qatari troops, as there is no more that

six thousand servicemen serving Doha. Once those soldiers are eliminated, Riyadh will be able to work on eradicating the Al Thani regime with which it has poisoned ties, since the sitting Qatari emir has been courting Iran, while obstructing Saudi Arabia and the UAE from advancing aspects of their agenda in the Persian Gulf. The main goal of the Arabian monarchies shared by both the US and Israel is to destroy Iran through any means possible since it represents the principal rival of the Sunni Arab regimes in the region. And, apparently, Riyadh has received Trump's consent for overthrowing the ruling Qatari family. It's clear that Saudi Arabia is far more important to the US in its future struggle against Iran than a tiny gas-driven emirate like Qatar, too ambitious for its own good.

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