

The Chemical Weapon Accusations against Syria are Overshadowing the Insurgent Retreat

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The timing of Tel Aviv's repeated attacks on Syria in May 2013 and the kindling of yet another round of accusations and tensions between the Turkish government and Syria that have resulted from the car bombings in the Turkish town of Reyhanli say a lot. Firstly, Tel Aviv's aerial strikes, via illegal use of Lebanese airspace, on the Syrian military research facility in the town of Jamraya, which is an urban galaxy of Damascus, clarifies Israel's role in destabilizing Syria. Israel is essentially acting as the insurgency air force. Secondly, Turkey's accusations against Syria are part of the Turkish government's demonization campaign against Damascus that has been used to justify Turkey's aggressive stance against the Syrians.

Israel's May strikes follow a similar attack at the start of 2013, in the month of January. The attack was justified as a pre-emptive strike on an Iranian missile convoy heading to Lebanon for delivery to the military wing of Hezbollah. These Israeli offensives in Syria involved boots on the ground to gather intelligence and, according the Syrian government, involved Israeli collaboration with the anti-government forces fighting in Syria. Israel has also been increasing its military presence in the Golan Heights. Aside from its jets, Israel is now openly known to have sent troops, spies, vehicles, and drones into Syria. It has been caught aiding the insurgency. Tel Aviv has also been caught spying on the Russian military in the Mediterranean port of Tartous, where three large devices embedded with electronic transmission gear were found off an island monitoring Russian ships.

The Israeli offensives additionally illuminate Washington's central role in organizing what is a siege and covert war against the Syrians by means of proxies and patsies. Tel Aviv's involvement in Syria was coordinated with the Obama Administration. Barak Obama's comment on the Israeli attacks were immediately supportive. The US President told the Telemundo network that the Israelis were justified in striking Syria and that the United States was coordinating against the Syrian government with Tel Aviv. Besides, the Israeli aerial strikes came after meetings were held between cabinet members from both the Obama and Netanyahu governments. Even earlier, President Obama visited Israel himself to mend fences between Israel and Turkey as a means to get both US allies to coordinate their efforts against the Syrians jointly.

Israeli and Turkish Military Coordination against Syria

The Israeli aerial attacks on Jamraya look like a calculated provocation aimed at instigating hostilities by using a Syrian response as a pretext for war. It should come as no surprise that after Israel's attack on Jamraya, Turkey and Israel launched military exercises on their respective borders with Syria—in the case of Israel this included the Golan Heights, which is

occupied Syrian territory. While the military movements of both Israel and Turkey were presented as separate exercise, they were in fact coordinated precautionary military postures by the two allies. Moreover, the US and a group of its allies began military drills off the Iranian coast in the Persian Gulf at the same time. The military posturing was either intended to intimidate Syria and its regional allies not to militarily retaliate against the Israeli strikes or was anticipating a Syrian military response that could open the door for a joint Israeli and Turkish assault on Syria or a regional conflict that would include Syria's allies in Iran and Lebanon. Despite the fact that the Iron Dome proved ineffective during Israel's fighting with Gaza in 2012 and has hence been called the "Paper Dome" in mockery, the Israelis additionally declared a state of alert and sent two of their Iron Dome anti-missile batteries towards the Lebanese and Syrian borders.

Twisted Narratives

Turkey has been playing a similar game in its border areas with the Syrians, including Turkish artillery exchanges with Syria. The Turkish government has been unsuccessfully been trying to galvanize the Turkish public to support its unpopular hostile policies against Syria. In both cases the real victim, Syria, has been turned into the aggressor, while the perpetrators are presented as the victims.

Israel's attack on Syria is presented as a purely defensive act by its proponents. Such a narrative misses the point that Israel has openly said that it has been involved in the conflict in Syria for the strategic reason of bleeding Syria and undermine the Iranians and their regional allies. There is an inverse error of logic here, because the Israeli narrative ignores the fact that any hypothetical Iranian weapons shipments to Hezbollah are a direct result of Israel's own repeated aggression on Lebanon. Hezbollah, which means "Party of God" in Arabic, was not created to destroy Israel; the Lebanese organization was created with the support of Iran with the aim of defending Lebanon from Israeli aggression only after several years of Israeli occupation passed by in Lebanon. It is worth noting that the Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon was justified by Tel Aviv on the basis of driving out the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), but continued even when the PLO left Lebanon.

In the case of Turkey, the Syrians have not been trying to instigate a conflict with Turkey. Turkey's AKP government has itself been actively supporting terrorism against Syria and allowing foreign forces to use Turkish soil as an infiltration point and logistics base. This, however, has not stopped the Turkish government from blaming the car bombings in Reyhanli on Syria from the moment they happened and without even conducting a proper investigation. Prime Minister Erdogan and his cabinet did not even acknowledge the more likely probability that the bombs were set by their own allies fighting against the Syrian government. Some would call the bombings in Reyhanli a "blowback" of some sorts while others have not ruled out the possibility of a "false flag" perpetrated to frame Syria. In fact, it turns out that Turkish officials were aware that the terrorist bombings were going to take place. Redhack, a Turkish activist group of internet hackers, released a series of cables revealing that Ankara's Gendarmerie Intelligence, which is responsible to Turkey's Ministry of the Interior, was aware that the attacks in Reyhanli were going to take place.

The Underlying Motives for the New Pressure: The Insurgency is being Defeated

A new equation is coming into effect. Because of the retreat of the insurgents, external pressure is now being applied to replace the declining internal pressure against Syria. In this

context, the Israeli and Turkish moves are part of a coordinated strategy orchestrated by Washington against Syria.

The Israeli attacks and the terrorist car bombings in Turkey serve to renew foreign pressure on Syria and escalate the interventionist war rhetoric against Damascus. This is a direct result of the serious defeats that the anti-government forces have faced internally in Syria. All the noise about the Syrian regime using chemical weapons that has been coming from American, Canadian, Israeli, Western European, Turkish, Saudi, and Qatari officials and mainstream media channels is part of the mix too. The noise about the use of chemical weapons in Syria and Ankara's ironically two-faced accusations about Syrian support for terrorism on the Turkish border hide the retreat of the anti-government militias.

The accusations of chemical weapons use and the events involving Israel and Turkey additionally are new variables that serve Washington's failing Syria strategy. These new variables give Washington increased leverage in talks with Syria's allies, specifically Russia and China, and more flexibility of action in the covert war on Syria. In some form or another, they also open the door for new possibilities for the objective of regime change in Syria and give Washington more room to bargain for political gains in Syria.

Who is using Chemical Weapons in Syria?

The Syrian government has approached the United Nations about the use of chemical weapons by the insurgent forces. It has requested a formal United Nations investigation. In turn, like an unoriginal re-run of the UN weapons inspections farce against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Obama Administration and its allies have worked to politicize the UN investigation as a means of blaming the Syrian government. This is one of the reasons that the US and its allies opted to prevent Russia from sending inspectors into Syria.

Despite the fact that chemical weapons have been used against government supporters in government-controlled areas, the insurgents and Syria's enemies are trying to blame Damascus for the chemical attacks. The Syrians have accused the insurgents and their foreign backers of deliberately using chemical weapons inside Syria as a means of creating a pretext for a direct NATO war in their country. Fingers have also been pointed at Turkey and Israel as suspects. Lawrence Wilkerson, who served as Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff, has even said during an interview on Current TV that the use of chemical weapons in Syria could be the result of a false flag operation, which could have possibly been perpetrated by Israel.

Although the United Nations has mostly been acquiescent to US demands against Syria, it has dismissed the chemical weapons accusations against Damascus. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, a UN investigative body that was set up by the Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Human Rights, has revealed that according to its findings it appears that the sarin gas in Syria was used by the anti-government forces and not the Syrian government. This was too inconvenient for Washington. The US immediately rejected the UN assessment whereas NATO went out of its way to undermine the report by saying it was skeptical of the UN findings. Instead the US and its allies pushed a resolution on May 15, 2013 against Syria in the United Nations General Assembly, which essentially saw the US and its allies and proxies vote against Syria and all the countries with independent foreign policies vote against the anti-Syrian resolution or abstain.

It is under this framework that the Obama Administration has said that the use of chemical weapons is a “redline” for US intervention. The US government even publicly urged NATO to reconsider a role for itself in Syria on the basis of the allegations by Israel, Britain, Turkey, France, and the Obama Administration about the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. The deadlock between Syria’s major allies and the US, however, makes direct military intervention by the Pentagon and NATO a difficult, dangerous, and unlikely proposal. The creation of a new Mediterranean task force by Russia, through the permanent deployment of a contingent of Russian warships from the Russian Pacific Fleet to the Mediterranean Sea, is tied to preventing US and NATO military intervention in Syria.

The chemical weapons fiasco is being used to justify further US aid to the insurgents instead of the direct war that the likes of the Syrian National Coalition, the Arab petro-sheikhdoms, the neo-cons, and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy have been promoting as cheerleaders. The insurgent defeat has put a new set of plans into motion against Syria and its allies. Even while Secretary of State John Kerry talks to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, to organize a second peace conference on Syria in Geneva, the US has declared that it is preparing to arm the insurgents with weapons. Akin to the accusations flooded against Libya and the Anglo-French moves used to launch Washington’s imperialist war on Libya, the accusations of chemical weapons use that the US and its allies are making against the Syrian government has acted as a smokescreen for ending the European Union weapons embargo on Syria. European Union member states will effectively be sending arms to the insurgents in Syria on the basis of these accusations.

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