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The Endgame of the US "Islamic State" Strategy

By Nicola Nasser
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Dismantling what the former US President George W. Bush once described as the Syria – Iran component of the "axis of evil," or interrupting in Iraq the geographical contiguity of what King Abdullah II of Jordan once described as the "Shiite crescent," was and remains the strategic goal of the US – Israeli allies in the Middle East unless they succeed first in "changing the regime" in either Damascus or Tehran.

The US , Israel and their regional allies have been on the record that the final target of their "regime change" campaign in the Middle East was to dismantle the Syria – Iran alliance.

With the obvious failure of Plan A to dismantle the self- proclaimed anti-Israel and anti – US Syrian – Iranian "Resistance Axis" by a forcible "regime change" in Damascus, a US – led regional alliance has turned recently to its Plan B to interrupt in Iraq the geographical contiguity of that axis.

This is the endgame of President Barak Obama's strategy, which he declared on last September 10 as ostensibly against the Islamic State (IS).

This would at least halt for the foreseeable future all the signed and projected trilateral or bilateral Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian pipeline networks to carry oil and gas from Iran and Iraq to the Syrian coast at the Mediterranean .

Israeli Col. (res.) Shaul Shay, a research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies and a former Deputy Head of the Israel National Security Council anticipated in writing on last January 21 what he called the "Salafi Crescent" that is dangerously emerging to challenge the "Shia Crescent."

"The growing involvement of Sunni Salafi jihadis in Iraq (since 2003), among the rebels in Syria (since 2011), and in Lebanon has created a ' Salafi Crescent ' … from Diyala [in eastern Iraq] to Beirut ," he wrote.

"A positive outcome" of this Salafi Crescent "will be the decline in Iranian influence in the region," Shay concluded.

Conspiracy theories aside, the eventual outcome is a sectarian Sunni military and political wedge driven into the Iraqi geographical connection of the Iran-Syria alliance in a triangle bordering Turkey in the north, Iran in the east, Jordan in the west and Saudi Arabia in the south and extending from north eastern Syria to the Iraqi province of Diyala which borders Iran.

Iraqi Kurdistan is already effectively an independent state and cut off from the central government in Baghdad, but separating Iran and Syria as well and supported by the same

US – led anti – IS coalition.

Amid the misinformation and disinformation, the fact is that the IS threat is being used as a smokescreen to confuse and blur this reality.

The IS was conceived and delivered in an American womb. The US – drafted and enforced current constitution produced the sectarian government that is still trying to rule in Iraq . Sectarian cleansing and exclusion of Sunnis could not but inevitably create its antithesis.

The IS was the illegitimate fetus born and nurtured inside the uterus of the US – engineered political process based on a constitution legalizing a federal system based in turn on sectarian and ethnic sharing of power and wealth.

This horrible illegitimate creature is the "legacy" of the US war on Iraq, which was "conceived" in the "sin" of the US invasion of the country in 2003, in the words of the president of the Arab American Institute, James J. Zogbi, writing in the Jordan Times on last June 16.

US Senator John McCain, quoted by The Atlantic on last June 23, thanked "God," the "Saudis and Prince Bandar" and "our Qatari friends" for creating the "monster."

The pro-Iran government of former Prime Minister Noori al-Maliki was squeezed by the IS military advances to "request" the US help, which Washington preconditioned on the removal of al-Maliki to which Iran succumbed. The IS gave Obama's IS strategy its first success.

However, al-Maliki's replacement by Haider al-Abadi in August has changed nothing so far in the sectarian component of the Iraqi government and army. The US support of Iraq under his premiership boils down only to supporting continued sectarianism in the country, which is the incubator of the survival of its IS antithesis.

Moreover, the destruction of the Iraqi state infrastructure, especially the dismantling of Iraq 's national army and security agencies and the Iraqi Baath party that held them intact, following the US invasion, has created a power vacuum which neither the US occupation forces nor the sectarian Shiite militias could fill. The IS was not powerful per se. They just stepped in on a no-man land.

Similarly, some four years of a US – led "regime change" effort, which was initially spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood and which is still financed, armed and logistically facilitated by the US regional allies in Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia as well as by allied western intelligence services, has created another power vacuum in Syria, especially on border areas and in particular in the northern and eastern areas bordering Turkey and Iraq.

US Senator Rand Paul in an interview with CNN on last June 22 was more direct, accusing the Obama administration of "arming" and creating an IS "safe haven" in Syria , which "created a vacuum" filled by the IS.

"We have been fighting alongside al Qaeda, fighting alongside ISIS . ISIS is now emboldened and in two countries. But here's the anomaly. We're with ISIS in Syria . We're on the same side of the war. So, those who want to get involved to stop ISIS in Iraq are allied with ISIS in Syria . That is the real contradiction to this whole policy," he said.

The former 16 – year member of the US Congress and two – time US presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, writing in the huffingtonpost.com on September 24, summed it up: The IS "was born of Western intervention in Iraq and covert action in Syria."

The US 'Trojan horse'

The IS could have considered playing the role of a US "Frankenstein," but in fact it is serving as the US "Trojan horse" into Syria and Iraq. Fighting the IS was the US tactic, not the US strategy.

On record, Iranian deputy foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that "the best way of fighting ISIS and terrorism in the region is to help and strengthen the Iraqi and Syrian governments, which have been engaged in a serious struggle" against the IS. But this would not serve the endgame of Obama's strategy, which targets both governments instead.

Beneficiaries of the IS "Trojan horse" leave no doubts about the credibility of the Syrian, Iranian and Russian doubts about the real endgame of the US – led declared war on the IS.

The United States was able finally to bring about its long awaited and promoted "front of moderates" against Iran and Syria into an active and "air-striking" alliance, ostensibly against the IS.

In Iraq, the IS served the US strategy in wrestling back the so called "political process" from the Iranian influence by proxy of the former premier al – Maliki. Depriving al – Maliki of a third term had proved that there is no unified Iran – backed "Shia house" in Iraq . The US has its own influence inside that "house."

Installing a US Iraqi satellite was the strategic goal of the US – led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Instead, according to Doug Bandow, writing in *Forbes* on last October 14, "Bush's legacy was a corrupt, authoritarian, and sectarian state, friendly with Iran and Syria, Washington's prime adversaries in the Middle East. Even worse was the emergence of the Islamic State."

This counterproductive outcome of the US invasion, which saw Iran wielding the reigns of power in Baghdad and edging Iraq closer to Syria and Iran during the eight years of al-Maliki's premiership, turned the red lights on in the White House and the capitals of its regional allies.

Al-Maliki, whom Bush had designated as "our guy" in Baghdad when his administration facilitated his premiership in 2006, turned against his mentors.

He edged Iraq closer to the Syrian and Iranian poles of the "axis of evil." Consequently he opposed western or Israeli military attack on Iran , at least from or via the Iraqi territory. In Syria , he opposed a regime change in Damascus , rejected direct military "foreign intervention" and indirect proxy intervention and insisted that a "political solution" is the only way forward in Iraq 's western Arab neighbor.

Worse still was his opening Iraq up to rival Chinese and Russian hydrocarbon investments, turning Iraq a part of an Iran-Iraq-Syria oil and gas pipeline network and buying weapons from the Russian Federation.

Al- Maliki had to go. He was backed by Iran to assume his second term as prime minister in

spite of the US , which backed the winner of the 2010 elections for the post, Ayad Allawi. The US had its revenge in the 2014 elections. Al-Maliki won the elections, but was denied a third term thanks to US pressure.

The IS was the US instrument to exert that pressure. US Secretary of State John Kerry during his visit to Baghdad on last June 23 warned that Iraq was facing “an existential threat.”

It was a US brinkmanship diplomacy to force al-Maliki to choose between two bad options: Either to accept a de facto secession of western and northern Iraq on the lines of Iraqi Kurdistan or accept the US conditional military support. Al-Maliki rejected both options, but he had paid the price already.

The turning point came with the fall of Iraq ’s second largest city of Mosul to the IS on last June 10. Iraqi Kurdistan inclusive, the northern and western Iraq , including most of the crossing points into Syria and Jordan in the west, were clinched out of the control of Baghdad , i.e. some two thirds of the area of Iraq . Al-Maliki was left to fight this sectarian Sunni insurgency by his sectarian Iran-backed Shiite government. This was a non-starter and was only to exacerbate the already deteriorating situation.

Al- Maliki and Iran were made to understand that no US support was forthcoming to reign in the IS until he quits and a less pro-Iran and a more “inclusive” government is formed in Iraq .

The creation of the IS as the sectarian Sunni alternative against Iran ’s ruling allies in Baghdad and Damascus was and is still the US tactic towards its strategic endgame. Until the time the US strategy succeeds in wrestling Baghdad from Iran influence back into its fold as a separating wedge between Iran and Syria, the IS will continue to serve US strategy and so far Obama’s strategy is working.

“America is using ISIS in three ways: to attack its enemies in the Middle East, to serve as a pretext for U.S. military intervention abroad, and at home to foment a manufactured domestic threat, used to justify the unprecedented expansion of invasive domestic surveillance,” Garikai Chengu, a research scholar at Harvard University, wrote in http://www.counterpunch.org/ on last September 19.

As a doctrine, since the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate early in the twentieth century, western powers did their best to keep Arabs separated from their strategic depth in their immediate Islamic proximity. The Syria – Iran alliance continues to challenge this doctrine.

Nicola Nasser is a veteran Arab journalist based in Birzeit, West Bank of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories (nassernicola@ymail.com).

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