

The Plan to Destabilize Syria

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The efforts to overthrow the Syrian government have a lot in common with what has been undertaken in Libya. However, the results are substantially different owing to each country's social and political background. The project to break up these two States simultaneously was initially brought up by John Bolton on 6 May 2002 when he was serving as Undersecretary of State in the Bush administration. Its implementation by the Obama administration nine years down the line – in the context of the Arab Awakening – is not without problems.

Like in Libya, the original plan intended to bring about a military coup, but it soon proved impossible owing to the lack of willing Syrian military officers. According to our sources, an analogous plan had also been envisaged for Lebanon. In Libya, the plot was leaked and Colonel Gaddafi proceeded to have Colonel Abdallah Gehani arrested [1]. In any case, the initial plan had to be revised in light of the unexpected “Arab Spring” scenario.

Military action

The central idea was to foment unrest in a well circumscribed area and to proclaim the establishment of an Islamic emirate that would serve as a platform for the dismemberment of the country. The choice of the Daraa district can be explained by its proximity to the Jordanian border and the Israeli occupied Golan Heights. This layout would make it easy to funnel supplies to the secessionists.

An incident was contrived involving students who engaged in provocations. It succeeded beyond all expectations given the brutality and stupidity of the local governor and police chief. When the demonstrations started, snipers were positioned on the roofs to shoot at random into the crowd and against the police forces. A similar script had been used in Benghazi to fuel the revolt.

Other clashes were planned, invariably in a border area to secure a support base, first in Northern Lebanon, then on the border with Turkey.

The skirmishes were led by small commandos, mostly made up of some forty men, combining individuals recruited on the spot with foreign mercenary overseers belonging to Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan's network. Bandar travelled to Jordan where he supervised the kick off of operations, together with CIA and Mossad officials.

But Syria is not Libya and the outcome was reversed. Indeed, whereas Libya is a state that was created by the colonial powers which united Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan by force, Syria is a historical country which was reduced to its simplest form by those same powers. Therefore, while Libya is spontaneously at the mercy of centrifugal forces, Syria

attracts centripetal forces bent on reconstructing Greater Syria (comprising Jordan, occupied Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus and part of Iraq). Syria's population today cannot but repudiate any plan to partition the country.

Also, a parallel can be made between Colonel Gaddafi's authority and that of Hafez al-Assad (Bashar's father). They rose to power during the same period and both made use of their intelligence and brutality to hold sway. Bashar al-Assad, on the contrary, did not seize power nor did he expect to inherit it. He accepted to fill the office of president when his father died because his older brother had perished in an accident and because only his family heritage could have prevented a power struggle among his father's generals.

Although it was the army who went to look for him in London, where he was quietly practicing his profession as an ophthalmologist, it is his people who be-knighted him. He is undeniably the most popular political leader in the Middle East. Up to two months ago, he was also the only one who moved around without armed guards, and felt comfortable in a crowd.

The military operation to destabilize Syria and the propaganda campaign that came with it have been orchestrated by a coalition of states under US coordination, in exactly the same way that NATO coordinates its member and non-member states to bombard and stigmatize Libya. As indicated above, the mercenary forces have been provided with the compliments of Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who was forced to knock on several doors, including in Pakistan and Malaysia, seeking to boost his personal army deployed in Manama and Tripoli. As an example, we can cite the installation of an *ad hoc* telecommunications center on the premises of the Ministry of Telecommunications in Lebanon.

Far from arousing the population against the "*regime*", this blood bath triggered a national outpouring for President Bashar al-Assad. Aware that they are being drawn into a civil war by design, the Syrians are standing shoulder to shoulder. The overall number of anti-government protest rallies garnered between 150 000 and 200 000 people out of a population of 22 million inhabitants. By contrast, the pro-government drew crowds the likes of which the country had never seen before.

The authorities reacted with calm in the face of such events. The President finally enacted the reforms that had been on his agenda for a long time, but which the majority of the population had resisted for fear they might westernize their society. Anxious not to fall into archaism, the Ba'ath Party has embraced a multiparty system. The army did not crackdown on the demonstrators – contrary to what the Western and Saudi media have reported – but reined in the armed groups. Unfortunately, the high-ranking military officers, most of whom were trained in the USSR, failed to practice any restraint towards the civilians who were caught in the middle.

The economic war

At that point, the Western-Saudi strategy needed to be revised. Realizing that military action would fall short of plunging the country into chaos in the near term, Washington decided to undermine Syrian society in the middle term. The rationale is that the policies of the Al-Assad government have been forging a middle class (the true mainstay of a democracy) and that it would be feasible to turn this class against him. In that case, an economic collapse of the country would have to be engineered.

Now, Syria's main resource is oil, even if its production cannot compare in volume with that of its rich neighbors. To market the oil, Syria must have assets deposited in Western banks to serve as guarantee during the transactions. It would be enough to freeze them in order to pull the country down. Hence, the expediency of tarnishing its image to mold western public opinion into accepting the "*sanctions against the regime.*"

In principle, an asset freeze requires a resolution by the UN Security Council, which appears problematic. China, for one, may not be in a position to oppose it since it has already been blackmailed to renounce its veto power in the Libyan context under threat of losing access to Saudi oil. But Russia could do it, without which it would lose its naval base in the Mediterranean would have to keep its Black Sea cooped up behind the [Dardanelles](#). The Pentagon has already attempted to intimidate Russia by deploying its guided-missile cruiser, the *USS Monterrey*, in the Black Sea to underscore the futility of Russia's naval ambitions.

Be that as it may, the Obama administration may decide to revive the 2003 *Syrian Accountability Act* allowing it to freeze Syrian assets independently of a UN resolution or Congress approval. Recent history has shown, especially as regards Cuba and Iran, that Washington can easily convince its European partners to endorse sanctions that it applies unilaterally.

Thus, the stakes have currently shifted from the battle field towards the media. Public opinion will allow the wool to be pulled over its eyes all the more given its ignorance of Syria and its blind faith in the new technologies.



French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé and his U.S. counterpart Hillary Clinton in Washington on 6 June 2011. © State Department.

The media war

At first, the propaganda campaign focused the public's attention on the crimes allegedly committed by the "*regime*" so as to avert any questions regarding the nature of the new opposition. In fact, these armed groups have little in common with the intellectual dissidents that drafted the *Damascus Declaration*. They emerge from Sunni religious extremist circles. These fanatics repudiate the religious pluralism of the [Levant](#) and long for a state to their image and likeness. They don't challenge President Bashar Al-Assad because they deem he is too authoritarian, but because he is an [Alawi](#), that is a heretic in their eyes.

Ever since, the anti-Bashar propaganda has been based on a reality reversal.

An amusing example is the case of the blog "*Gay Girl in Damascus*", created on 21 February 2011. Edited in English by 25 year-old Amina, the website became a source of reference for Western media. Therein the author described the plight of a young lesbian under Bashar's dictatorship and the day-to-day unfolding of the terrible repression unleashed against the revolution. As a gay woman, she garnered the protective empathy of Western web surfers who mobilized as soon as her arrest by the secret services of the "*regime*" was announced.

However, as it happened, Amina was a fiction. Betrayed by his IP address, a US 40 year-old "*student*" was discovered to be the real author of this masquerade. This propagandist, who was allegedly preparing a PhD in Scotland, recently participated in a pro-Western opposition conference held in Turkey, urging for a NATO intervention. He quite obviously did not attend in his capacity as a student [2].

What is particularly surprising is not so much the gullibility of the internet surfers who swallowed the lies about the fake Amina, but the outpouring of the defenders of freedom in support of those who trample those same freedoms. In secular Syria, private life is sacrosanct and homosexuality, though prohibited by the texts, is not curbed. It may cause malaise within the family, but not in society. On the other hand, those who are upheld by the media as revolutionaries, and that we consider instead to be counter-revolutionaries, are vehemently homophobic. They are even contemplating the introduction of corporal punishment or, in some cases, the death penalty to punish that “vice.”

Reality reversal is a principle being applied on a large scale. We may recall the United Nations reports on the humanitarian crisis in Libya alleging that tens of thousands of immigrant workers were fleeing the country to escape from violence. The conclusion drawn and spewed by the Western media was that the Gaddafi “*regime*” had to be toppled in favor of the Benghazi rebels. And yet, it was not the government of Tripoli who was responsible for this tragedy, but the so-called revolutionaries in Cyrenaica who were hunting down black Africans. Stirred by a racist ideology, they accused them of being at the service of Colonel Gaddafi and lynched whoever they could get their hands on.

In Syria, the images of armed groups perched on the rooftops and firing at random into the crowd or on police forces were broadcast on national television networks. Yet, these same images were relayed and used by Western and Saudi television channels to attribute these crimes to the government of Damascus.

At the end of the day, the plan to destabilize Syria is not working all that well. It succeeded in persuading public opinion that the country is in the grips of a brutal dictatorship, but it also welded the vast majority of the Syrian population firmly behind its government. Ultimately, the plan could backfire on those who masterminded it, notably Tel Aviv. In January-February 2011 we witnessed a revolutionary wave in the Arab world, followed in April-May by a counter-revolutionary wave. The swing of the pendulum is still in motion.

Notes

[1] “[French plans to topple Gaddafi on track since last November](#)”, by Franco Bechis, Libero (Italie), *Voltaire Network*, 25 March 2011.

[2] “[War propaganda: gay blogger in Damascus](#)”, *Voltaire Network*, 13 June 2011.

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