

# The Syrian Intelligence War: A Tale of Two Security Headquarters

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Global Research, July 31, 2012  
31 July 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)  
Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),  
[US NATO War Agenda](#)  
In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

*There is much more to the conflict in Syria than meets the eye. Syria is currently the scene of a cold war between the US, NATO, Israel, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on one side and Russia, China, Iran, and the Resistance Bloc on the other hand. Amidst the fighting between the Syrian government and anti-government forces, an intense intelligence war has also been taking place.*

Germany's foreign intelligence service, the Bundes Nachrichtendienst (BND, Federal Intelligence Service), has been pointing its finger at Al-Qaeda for the bombings in Syria. This, however, has the effect of hiding and detracting the role that the intelligence services of the US and its allies have played. By crediting Al-Qaeda, the Bundes Nachrichtendienst is helping get Washington and its allies off the hook. Albeit Al-Qaeda is far more than just a US intelligence asset, the organization and label of Al-Qaeda is a catch-all term that is used to camouflage the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other affiliated intelligence services.

Syrian intellectuals and scientists have also been reportedly assassinated in Damascus. Like in Iraq and Iran, it is probably the work of Israel's Mossad and part of Tel Aviv's policy of crippling scientific and technological advancement in enemy states. Informed sources in Washington have already clarified that Israel is helping the Free Syrian Army and actively participating in the intelligence war against Syria. An unnamed US official has confirmed to David Ignatius that both the CIA and Mossad are involved in Syria. [1] In his own words: "Scores of Israeli intelligence officers are also operating along Syria's border, though they are keeping a low profile." [2] A Qatari defector in Venezuela has also been reported to have divulged that the Qataris have been outsourced intelligence work against Syria by the CIA and Mossad.

## The Bombing of the Syrian National Security Headquarters and its Crisis Unit in Damascus

There are still a lot of unanswered questions about the bombing of the Syrian National Security Headquarters in the northwest Damascene neighbourhood of Al-Rawda on July 18, 2012. Very little is actually known about what happened exactly. Moreover, Syrian television and media did not show scenes of the explosion as people have become accustomed to. This may be due to the security-based nature of the bombing location.

Key members of Syria's security and military command structure, Dawoud Rajiha, Assef Shawkat, and Hassan Turkmani, were all killed on July 18. Rajiha was the Syrian defence minister, deputy prime minister, and deputy commander-in-chief of the Syrian Armed

Forces. Assef Shawkat was the Syrian deputy defence minister and the husband of Bashar Al-Assad's older sister Bushra. Hassan Turkmani was the Syrian assistant vice-president, head of Syria's crisis management operations, and the army general that was formerly minister of defence from 2004 to 2009. Hisham Ikhtiyar (Bakhtiar/Bakhtyar), the chief of the Syrian National Security Bureau, who was also hurt by the bombing, would also die from the injuries he sustained two days later on July 20. These men all formed what was called the Crisis Unit.

A moment should also be taken to note that the biographic background of these dead high-ranking Syrian officials disproves the allegations that the Syrian government is an Alawite regime. While Skawkat was an Alawite, Rajiha was a Greek Orthodox Christian, Ikhtiyar a Sunni Muslim, and Turkmani was both an ethnic Turkoman and Sunni Muslim.

The Killing of Crisis Unit Members was executed by a Foreign Intelligence Service

Saudi sources have taken the opportunity to report that the Syrian officials were killed by Maher Al-Assad, the commander of the Syrian Republican Guard and President Al-Assad's younger brother, because of a rift between them that saw the general's supporting a political solution over a combative solution. [3] Pakistani sources, claiming to be receiving direct reports from the perpetrators of the July 18 bombing, contradicted the report by saying Maher Al-Assad was also a target and wounded during the attack. [4] The Pakistani source published the following:

"Everyone came in time, but Maher Al-Assad did not show up. Two men responsible for the mission waited for some time and pressed the remote control button as the dreaded general took his seat," the [Syrian Free Army] source said.

"Our men filmed the video from a safe distance which would be made public at an appropriate time," he revealed to this correspondent [that is, Naveed Ahmad]. One of the two daredevils was an employee of the government and worked in the very office the device was planted while the other was an outsider, according to the [Syrian Free Army] source.

[...]

The [Free Syrian Army] sources said Maher had brought his best friend Ghassan Bilal to the meeting as well. Maher al-Assad, who was never seen in the funeral of the key security aides assassinated in the attack, was in fact severely injured and according to a source de-capacitated. [5]

What the Pakistani source discloses is unreliable for several reasons. One of them is that the credibility of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) is extremely questionable. The Free Syrian Army has an undeniable track-record for shoddy propaganda and lying. Syria has also rejected claims about the Free Syrian Army's involvement and the assertions that the bomb was remote-controlled. Lebanon's Al-Manar, which is Hezbollah's media network, has reported that there were two bombs and the first was actually dismantled by Assef Shawkat before the second one exploded.

This was actually the second attempt to kill this gathering of Syrian military, security, and intelligence officials. The out of control Free Syrian Army, whose reign of terror has seen brutal and senseless attacks on the civilian population and various acts of lawlessness and

terrorism, had claimed on May 20 to have murdered these same Syrian officials earlier, as well as Interior Minister Mohammed Shaar and Baath Party leader Mohammad Saeed Bkheitan. [6] The claims of the Free Syrian Army turned out to be false the first time as the alleged assassinated Syrian officials appeared on television and denied the SFA's claims. This time, however, there was no immediate credit taken and there was silence about the murders.

The Free Syrian Army was most probably bypassed by the US and its allies for this targeted attack. Instead of outsourcing the attack to the Free Syrian Army, the operation was probably directly conducted either by the intelligence agency of a NATO or GCC state or a consortium of intelligence agencies trying to topple the Syrian government.

### A Damascene Operation Ajax

The attack on the Syrian National Security Headquarters in Al-Rawda was a carefully coordinated event that was synchronized with the assault on Damascus by the various armed groups operating under the umbrella and banner of the Free Syrian Army. It is clear that the US and its allies more or less used the same playbook of tactics in Damascus that were used in 2011 to topple the Jamahiriya government in Tripoli. Both are modern reincarnations of the infamous Operation Ajax, which was an intelligence operation launched in 1953 by the US and British governments to topple the democratic government of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossageh in Iran. Washington and London installed a brutal and repressive dictatorship under Mohammed-Reza Shah in place of Dr. Mossadegh's government and Iran was transformed from a constitutional monarchy into a de facto absolute monarchy.

The aim of the attack on high-ranking Syrian officials, especially important figures from the military and security apparatus that has been the backbone of the Syrian regime, was two-pronged. The attack's aim was to cripple Syria's command structure with the objective of disorganizing resistance to anti-government forces and creating internal panic within the hierarchy of the Syrian government and military. This psychological blow was supposed to lead to fear, defections, and betrayal as anti-government forces attacked the gates of the Syrian capital.

The mainstream media, in terms of what scholar Edward Said called "image making" experts, also played a supportive role in the US-sponsored siege of Damascus. [7] Securing a monopoly over information and air waves has also been a part of the intelligence war and a goal of the US and its allies. This is why the signals of Syrian broadcasters have been banned from the Arab Satellite Communications Organization (Arabsat) and Nilesat satellite feeds. This is aimed at preventing Syria from countering the claims of the US and its allies and proxies. By the same token the US and the EU are also trying to cut and block Iranian stations, which are challenging the accounts of the mainstream media in NATO and GCC states. This is also the reason why the US and British media very decidedly condemned the Iranian, Russian, and Chinese medias in their news coverage of the Syrian crisis, which challenge the tide of misinformation from the declining networks of CNN, Fox News, France 24, and Al Jazeera. [8]

Like the original Operation Ajax in 1953, in which the state-run British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) took part, the mainstream media broadcasts from NATO and GCC states have been synchronized to shape the events on the ground. The media war intensified when

the anti-government forces launched their attack of Damascus. The aim was to fuel panic and fear with the hope of getting the Syrian government and the Syrian military to scatter and lose hope instead of facing the anti-government forces. The ultimate objectives are to demoralize the Syrian population and to weaken the Syrian government's domestic support.

The media outlets of NATO and GCC states insinuated that President Assad and his family fled Damascus to Latakia and would seek asylum in the Russian Federation. [9] Again, the aims were to cause panic and both the governments in Syria and Russia rejected the false claims. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Assad was "not even thinking about" fleeing to Russia. [10] This was a repeat of British Foreign Secretary William Hague's 2011 lie that Muammar Qaddafi had fled from Libya to Venezuela. [11] This behaviour also falls into line with British Prime Minister David Cameron's false claim that Vladimir Putin had told him that President Assad had to step down. [12]

#### A New Saudi Intelligence Boss: Return of Prince "Bandar Bush"

Shortly after the bombing of the Syrian National Security Headquarters, a July 19 royal decree was enacted in Riyadh to replace Prince Muqrin (Mogren) bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud with Prince Bandar bin Sultan Al-Saud as the director-general of the external intelligence agency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Al-Istikhbarat Al-Amah (General Intelligence).

Since 2005, Prince Bandar has been the secretary-general of the Saudi Arabian National Security Council, but his new appointment has made heads turn and is being used to infer that Saudi Arabia has a far more aggressive foreign policy. What the appointment reflects is that Saudi Arabia is fully in the service of the US in its intelligence wars against Syria and Iran and that Washington's men in Riyadh have a firm grip over Saudi Arabia's intelligence, security, and military apparatus. In the words of the Saudi pundit Jamal Khashoggi and the chief of the Bahrain-based Al-Arab network: "Bandar is quite aggressive, not at all like a typical cautious Saudi diplomat. If the aim is to bring Bashar down quick and fast, he will have a free hand to do what he thinks necessary." [13]

Prince Bandar, the son of the deceased Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, has been one of the central figures in creating Al-Qaeda and manipulating militant groups as geo-political tools for Washington since the Cold War. He was the Saudi ambassador to the US from 1983 to 2005. He has been a key figure in the intelligence war in Lebanon against Hezbollah and its allies and involved in exporting Fatah Al-Islam to Lebanon in an attempt to help the Hariri family fight Hezbollah and the March 8 Alliance.

Because he was the Saudi ambassador to Washington, he became the key figure in Saudi-US relations and developed close ties to the Bush family, which earned him the name "Bandar Bush." It has been reported that the relationship was so close that the US Secret Service was part of his security detail. Moreover, he has had a long history with Robert Gates, starting from when Gates was a member of the CIA and helping mobilize fighters in Afghanistan against the Soviets. [14]

In 2009, Bandar may have attempted to launch a silent coup in Saudi Arabia to impose his father, Crown Prince Sultan, as the new absolute monarch of Saudi Arabia. He was not seen for several years and may have been in some form of confinement. Things changed, however, in 2011 with the Arab Spring; Prince Bandar, Washington's man, was seen in public again.

Bandar may also be a key figure in Saudi negotiations with Pakistan to purchase nuclear bombs. [15] *United Press International* writes:

“As Iran becomes more dangerous and the United States becomes more reluctant to engage in military missions overseas, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia may find that renewed military and nuclear cooperation is the best way to secure their interests,” observed Christopher Clary and Mara E. Karlin, former [Pentagon] policy advisers on South Asia and the Middle East. [16]

The picture that UPI depicts actually is misleading. If anyone is pushing the Saudis to acquire nuclear weapons, it is Washington. The US has also been heavily arming the Saudi regime and the GCC for the same reasons. One dimension of the US strategy is clear: Washington aims to create multiple and ongoing contained conflicts in the Middle East to bleed the region and keep it immobilized. Like the Israelis, the US wants perpetual civil war in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, and even Turkey. By being duped into burning its bridges with Syria, the Turkish government has laid the foundations for the destabilization of the Turkish republic.

#### A Tale of Two Security Headquarters

Days after the appointment of Prince Bandar and the attack of the Syrian Crisis Unit an attack on General Intelligence’s Headquarters in Riyadh was reported by Yemen’s Al-Fajr Press and then widely quoted by the Iranian media. The blast is reported to have killed Banadar’s number two man, the deputy director-general of Saudi external intelligence, while he was entering the building. Rumours are also circulating that Bandar may have been hurt or killed. Saudi Arabia has remained silent over the issue.

The blast in Riyadh is no mere coincidence. It is a retaliatory response to the blast in the Syrian National Security Headquarters. The chances that the Syrians executed the operation while all their energies are being spent on fighting against the US-directed siege on their country are marginal, but still possible. This is speculation, but it is most likely that one of Syria’s friends and allies retaliated against the Saudis for their involvement in the attack on the Crisis Unit in Damascus.

A remote-controlled bomb was also discovered in front of a Yemenese Intelligence building in Aden on July 22, 2012. [17] The event came shortly after a Yemenese intelligence officer died after a targeted attack in the province of Bayda. [18] What this means is a matter of speculation, but what is clear is that the intelligence apparatus of Arab states are being targeted. There is a full-out intelligence war in the Middle East and there are probably cross-cutting alliances.

#### The Bush Jr. Administration’s “Redirection” Policy is Manifest under Obama

In Yemen, the national military has successfully been fractured and divided, which is exactly what Washington, DC and its NATO and GCC allies want to replicate in Syria. Regime change is not their only goal, the destruction and balkanization of the Syrian Arab Republic is. They want sectarianism and balkanization to take root in Syria and across the Middle East. To paraphrase, when the so-called spiritual leaders of the Syrian Free Army and anti-government forces begin saying that “Israel and the Sunnis are allies against the Shias” or that “all Alawites must be exterminated,” it is clear that the end goal is to regionally divide and conquer the peoples of the Middle East by pitting them against one another.

This is part of the Middle East policy that the Bush Jr. White House called the “redirection” in 2007: “The ‘redirection,’ as some inside the White House have called the new strategy, has brought the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.” [19] Robert Gates, Bandar’s old comrade, was brought into the Pentagon to oversee this “redirection” and retained by Barak Obama, who’s “A New Beginning” Speech in Cairo is an extension of this policy. *The New Yorker* is worth quoting about what the “redirection” policy began to implement: “[Washington] has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.” [20]

Regardless of the political position that one takes about President Assad and his government, what has to be emphasized is that the governments of the US, UK, France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are not involving themselves under the cover of the so-called “international community” on the basis of concern for the Syrian people and their well being. Because of them the words “protester” and “activist” have been hijacked by anti-government militias and foreign intelligence services. Humanitarianism and human rights are not the motive for US involvement. This is a fairy-tale for the naïve. Geo-political opportunism is at play and all the parties involved have blood on their hands at the expense of the Syrian people.

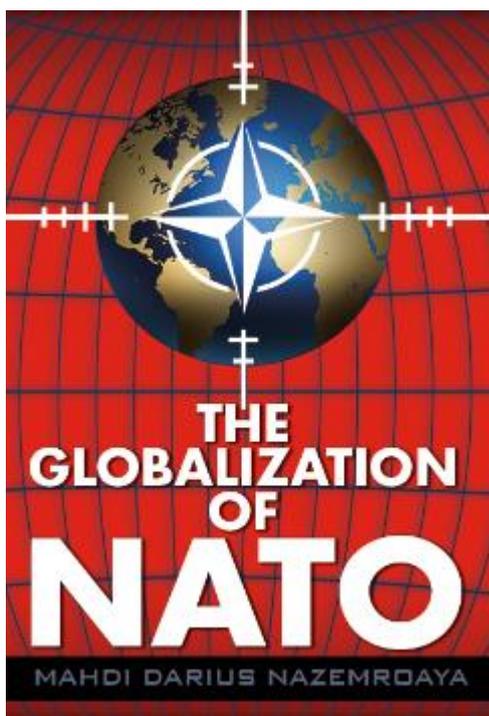
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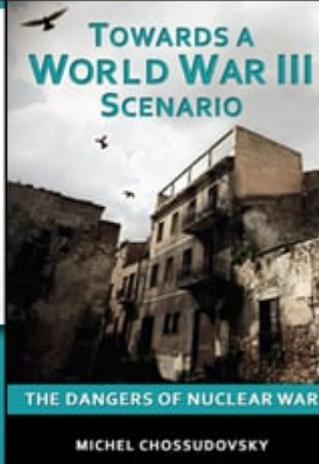
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*Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya's Book, Clarity Press*



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