

Western Sectarian Subversion of Syria is Fuelling Region-Wide Bloodshed

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The sectarian violence being fomented in Syria is fanning out and threatening to engulf the wider region and beyond. This dynamic is, in turn, unleashing insecurity and instability among populations far beyond Syria's borders. Like igniting a wildfire, the incendiary effects may be much harder to quench than they were to start, with untold suffering and political fallout.

The instigator of this explosive dynamic is the de facto US-led coalition that is desperately seeking to topple the Syrian government of Bashar Al Assad in Syria.

Unable to assert its agenda for regime change through the diplomatic channels of the United Nations, due to Russian and Chinese defiance, Washington and its allies are ramping up the heat within Syria by covert sabotage and terrorism. A central tactic is to incite sectarian violence and division among Syria's population in order to undermine the authority of the Damascus government.

Already the sectarian fire that the US-led axis is playing with in Syria has sparked a wave of bloodletting in neighbouring Iraq with levels of violence this week rising to the worst seen for years in that country. This may be a harbinger of even much worse to come not only in Iraq, but across the region – with conflicts erupting between Shia and Sunni Muslims and also between Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and other ethnic groups. It seems more than coincidence that over the past 16 months of intensifying violence in Syria there has been a stepwise increase in inter-communal aggressions across the wider region.

Sunni majority Pakistan, for example, has seen a flare up of killings against its minority Shia population with a spate of bomb attacks killing dozens in the western city of Quetta and nearby areas bordering Afghanistan.

Across India, there are renewed conflicts between Muslims and Hindus, forcing tens of thousands into migration, with the northeast state of Assam riven by the sharpest conflicts. Over 30 people have been killed in clashes this week between Muslims and Bodo tribespeople in Assam. There have also been clashes between Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

The Times of India reports: "Gun battles between police and roving mobs of rioters armed with guns, machetes and sticks [have] continued overnight, despite police warnings that violators would be shot on sight if they broke a curfew."

From last month, the surge in persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar by Buddhists

could also be seen as a repercussion of perceived religious strife in Syria. Hundreds of Rohingya have been killed and thousands displaced from attacks reportedly by the armed forces of the Myanmar military junta, which wants that Muslim community to return to its historic homeland of Bangladesh.

There have been reports too of renewed violent clashes between Christian and Muslim communities in East Africa, with deadly attacks occurring in both Ethiopia and Kenya.

While many of these inter-religious and inter-ethnic hostilities have a long history stemming from European colonialism, and while there are other contemporary forces at play, such as poverty, hunger and communal dislocations due to extreme floods, nevertheless it seems more than plausible that there is a spillover effect from Syria. Namely, that the sectarian destabilisation of that country is fuelling region-wide insecurities and conflicts – conflicts that may spiral out of control into civil wars.

For months now the covert game plan played out by the US, Britain and France, along with Turkey, Israel and Gulf Arab dictatorships has been to inflame sectarian fear and division in Syria. The main objective is to undermine the Baathist ruling party of President Assad, which has been in power for over 40 years even though the Assad family belongs to the minority Alawite sect of Shia Islam. The majority of Syria professes Sunni Islam.

It is testimony to the secular nature of the Syrian state and its culture of pluralism that this divide-and-rule tactic has so far failed to splinter the society. By and large, the Syrian people seem to be holding firmly to principles of tolerance towards each other, whether non-religious, Christian, Jew or Muslim, Shia or Sunni. Civilian sources say that while there may be criticism of the Assad regime from the point of view of demands for more democratic power-sharing, Assad still retains popular support because the majority of Syrians see the incumbent administration as a defender of religious and secular freedoms.

This is further underlined by the religious make-up of the four security chiefs who were killed last week in the assassination bomb attack on the National Security headquarters in Damascus. The victims – senior members of Assad's inner circle – included Shia, Sunni and Christian faiths.

Heading up the US-led tactic of sectarian warfare in Syria is the Gulf dictatorship of Saudi Arabia, with its black expertise in Sunni despotism. The Saudi monarchy is an adherent to the extreme Wahhabist sect of Sunni Islam. Wahhabism harbours a deep, visceral antipathy towards Shia Islam, seeing the latter as a heresy. This stems from the historic schism in Islam over the disputed lineage of authority from Prophet Mohammed. In its extreme expression, certain Wahhabists would even consider it a religious duty to kill Shia members over their alleged apostasy. This fundamentalist mindset, espoused by the House of Saud, and to a lesser extent the other Sunni Gulf monarchies, is politically expedient for the Western powers. It serves as a driving force among Saudi-backed mercenaries and Jihadists to commit extreme acts of violence in Syria, such as massacres and no-warning car bombs, in order to terrorise the population and destabilize the incumbent government.

For many years, Saudi Arabia's Wahhabist House of Saud has been proselytizing the Middle East region with its fundamentalist version of Islam. Saudi petrodollars have funded the building of mosques and the beaming of satellite television stations dedicated to preaching that brand of faith. This religious fanaticism has also manifested in the emergence of

reactionary Jihadists linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists and Al Qaeda. Despite claims of fighting “a war on terror”, Saudi and Western military intelligence have had a long, covert partnerships with these groups in carrying out shared political objectives dating back to the overthrow of Soviet Afghanistan, and more recently in the subversion of Libya and currently Syria.

The paramount geopolitical objective is the containment and ideally the long-term destabilization of Shia Iran – the perceived nemesis of the House of Saud – in its ambition for regional hegemony. The Western powers, of course, share that objective for interests of securing cheap oil supply, the maintenance of the petrodollar system, propping up the garrison Zionist state of Israel, and for the suppression of democratic nationalism across the region. The Western-backed Saudi suppression of democracy in Bahrain and Yemen are salient cases in point.

In Syria, Saudi intelligence is suspected of being behind a long and fiendish list of dirty tricks to ignite sectarian war. The appointment of Prince Bandar bin Sultan, former ambassador to Washington, as head of Saudi intelligence is seen as particularly significant. Whole villages, such as Houla and Qubair, have been massacred in cold blood by Saudi and Western-backed Jihadists. The recent attack by mercenaries to desecrate the holy Shia shrine of Sayyida Zainab is believed to have been ordered by the Saudis, with the obvious intention of whipping up tit-for-tat reprisals against Sunnis. The deployment of snipers to fire on civilians from the minarets of Shia mosques is also seen as an attempt to incite revenge attacks.

As noted, the Syrian population seems well aware of the dirty tricks being perpetrated by external forces and it is not falling into the trap of internecine feuding. Indeed, there are accounts of tenacious solidarity between Shia and Sunni Syrians, as well as Muslims, Christians and Jews, in the face of mutual hardship and suffering inflicting by foreign-backed militia.

This failure to unleash sectarian bloodshed in Syria may be what is behind the re-escalation of violence across Iraq. This week saw more than 100 Iraqis killed in bombings and shootings in more than 18 cities, including the capital, Baghdad. Since May, through June and July, the death toll has risen to near 500 and it shows a clear targeting of the Shia population, with devastating attacks on the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf.

Iraq’s foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari recently said that his government is increasingly alarmed about a spillover of violence from Syria to Iraq and the rest of the Middle East.

This week, Hakem Al Zameli, a member of Iraqi parliament committee on security and defence, noted: “It is clear that there is a direct connection between the events in Syria and the insecurity in Iraq, and those that conduct murder and bombings in Iraq are the same people who are currently engaged in bombing and killing the Syrian people.” Al Zameli went on to say that the perpetrators belonged to Al Qaeda groups – typical of Saudi and Western intelligence operations.

Many analysts believe that the Jihadist mercenaries recruited and supplied by Saudi Arabia and Western intelligence to wreak havoc in Syria are now plying their nefarious trade once again in Iraq. The Shia-led government of Baghdad has been supportive of Damascus and Tehran, objecting to diplomatic moves by the West to isolate Syria and Iran.

It seems that, given the failure to incite sectarian conflict in Syria, Saudi Arabia and the

Western powers are now opening a new front for destabilisation through neighbouring Iraq. Such involvement by these agencies in Iraq has a well-worn history during the nine-year NATO occupation of that country.

However, any short-term success from such a stratagem with regard to Western plans for regime change in Syria could prove to be a Pyrrhic victory – if the whole region and beyond explodes into sectarian flames that end up consuming nations, including those of the Gulf monarchs.

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