



NEAR EAST BULLETIN ON SYRIA ^{*1}

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Syria at a Critical Crossroads A Federal or a Failed State?

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SYRIA IN THE TIMES OF ARAB SPRING

Key Points

THE DYNAMICS OF TERRORISM AND SOCIAL UNREST AND THEIR IMPACT ON A FUTURE REGIONAL CRISIS. THE CASE OF SYRIA (June 2011)

Syria exerts a rather significant political influence in Lebanon through Hezbollah which can be exploited in the case of a regional crisis to exert limited military pressure on Israel. On the other hand, its backward economy and its inefficient military apparatus, in combination with the exhibited decisiveness of Israel to draw an “iron curtain” between Syria and its allies (Hezbollah and Iran) highly reduce the possibilities of a whole-hearted and massive mobilization of its forces and of its military options.

RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND SYRIA AND THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS (June 2012)

Iran seeks the help of the Syrian regime to play the role of protector of Shiite Muslims in the Middle East as a vehicle for implementing the national "expansion" of the policy. For Tehran, the Syrian crisis is only the Iranian case. For the Syrian regime of Assad, the approach to Iran is the only way to stay in power because of the pressures of Syrian demonstrators, Turkish attitudes and sanctions of the international community. The Syrian Assad regime is the lung of Iran and the heart of Hezbollah in the Middle East and its fall will be a final blow to the Iranian “Shiite” crescent that causes "fear" in Sunni countries.

THE ROLE OF TURKEY IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND THE CHALLENGES IT FACES (June 2012)

Turkey seems to follow a stance of continuous and intense pressure on president Assad for substantial changes. This pressure increases with the possibility of the Syrian regime collapsing which would lead to the ensuing of anarchy, international intervention, various problems concerning the Kurdish matter and possible refugee problems.

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It seems the future of the Syrian regime lies in the hands of foreign intervention, such as Turkey’s and Iran’s, and it could turn the Syrian matter from a national to a regional crisis because of the continuous interventions and different attitudes the two competing regional forces demonstrate. This is why it is imperative for the countries of the Arab league to take a stand so that the Syrian crisis remains under Arab control.

THE GRAND BRITISH INITIATIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST - The case of Syria (June 2012)

One factor which appears to act as a ‘common geopolitical denominator’ in the minds of policy makers in Washington, London and Jerusalem, is the ‘reforming’ character of Alawite Assad regime which seems to be more ‘trust-worthy’ than the straightforward Arab Muslims of Syrian anti-government resistance groups (most of them characterized by pan-arabic ideological inclinations), under the condition, of course, that Assad’s political, military and economic ties with Iran are drastically weakened.

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As it is evident from the above, despite its fierce political reactions and the punitive economic measures against the Syrian regime the U.S. administration is not aiming (for the time being) to a military intervention in Syria or change of its regime. Most probably U.S. administrations aims to keep Assad’s regime in power under the condition that it will stop crossing the red American lines regarding Iran, Hamas and probably Russia.

THE SYRIAN CRISIS AS THE PRELUDE OF A NEW ORDER IN THE REGION (September 2013)

Threats to the Anglo-Saxons domination policies in the Middle East

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The Turkish ‘independent-minded’ foreign policy pursuits, especially Erdogan’s grand (Islamist) visions and designs in the Middle East and Turkey’s intense military and political involvement in Syria: supply of anti-Assad’s forces with military equipment and advisors and intensifying efforts to establish herself as the ‘grand protégé’ of the Syrian opposition.

Anglo-Saxons geopolitical pursuits in the Middle East

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- Undermine the political, economic and military influence of Turkey in the Region and particularly its military and political penetration in Syria.
- Creation of a great Kurdistan, a pro-American loose political and mainly military entity controlling the main water and oil resources of the Middle East.
- Creation of a federal Syria encompassing a highly autonomous Kurdish state and an Allewite state accommodating Russian naval bases to achieve among other control over the Syrian Gates.
- Destabilization and then change of the theocratic regime in Iran and elimination of its nuclear capabilities and the establishment of a pro-western and obedient regime in the country (an objective shared by both partners).
- Keeping Russians at a ‘safe distance’ from Middle East geopolitical gravity areas.

The objectives of a (possible) wider intervention scenario in Syria

The general frontier-re-design scenario will be most probably unfolded through several phases:

- The initial phase of the intervention, the imminent bombardment of Syria, is expected to have two objectives:
 - (a) U.S. (as they have already announced) planned the initial phase of its military intervention in Syria (the missile strikes) to be short enough (to cover no more than a few weeks) and narrow enough as far as targeting is concerned. After all, the whole operation (the wider intervention and the Region’s frontiers re-design) has been planned very carefully in all its details by Washington and Jerusalem and its initial (‘reconnaissance’) phase will be short and narrow enough not to provoke unmanageable international reactions. This phase is most probably designed to test the readiness, quality and effectiveness of Russian state-of-art military equipment and installations in Syria and explore the decisiveness and readiness of military and diplomatic response and reaction tactics of Russia, Syria and Turkey (and of course of Germany and UK at the diplomatic level). After this ‘reconnaissance’ phase a re-assessment of the American and Israeli tactics will take place during which a new round of more ‘persuasive’ information will be leaked to the international community to lower down the negative reactions to the next, more decisive, more lethal and more time consuming phase of the intervention. The set of targets (economic, military and diplomatic) of this phase, besides Syria, includes also Turkey, Iran, Germany and possibly Russia.
 - (b) The second objective is the delivery of a very persuasive message to Assad’s regime to cut ‘communications’ with Iran and start (possibly secret) talks with Washington.

THE SYRIAN ENERGY POLICIES OF THE “FOUR SEAS” AND THEIR GEOPOLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS (February 2014)

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Turkey, after a short period of wavering, took a clear and decisive position against Assad’s regime. Conclusively, one of the contributing factors to the Syrian crisis seems to be an escalating ‘geo-energy war’: as soon as the comparative differential geopolitical significance of energy paths and the various energy resources of the Levant Basin were clearly recognized, Syria acquired an enhanced geostrategic importance, (Karkazis, Vidakis, Baltos, 2010: 108-111). Furthermore, the upgrading of Syria as an energy hub would considerably reduce the benefits enjoyed by Washington from the

control of the Persian Gulf and at the same time would result in the reduction of the dependence of E.U. on Russian energy resources and on energy paths controlled by the U.S. The above may also explain, to some degree, the growing geopolitical understanding developed recently between U.S. and Russia on Middle East issues. If we cross-examine the above with the enormous interests of American oil companies in the Region (and their influence on governmental politics) and the long term Washington policies to isolate Iran (and also Syria in its capacity as an ally of Tehran) then we can more clearly recognize the option of rupture with the Syrian regime. Finally, as we may conclude from the following remarks Turkish geostrategic interests could be also hurt.

A fall of Assad's regime would open the door to the restoration of only the Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline (at least initially) the design of which took place in 1930 to allow for the transportation of Iraqi oil to Mediterranean ports. This restoration will be undertaken by western firms and this will lead to the entrance in Syria of western multinational oil companies (under the American auspices) and the subsequent uncontrolled exploitation of its energy resources. We stress at this point a norm (prerequisite) in the geopolitics of energy: before the great powers proceed with strategic investments in the area of hydrocarbons they try their best to secure first the long-term stability and friendliness of the geopolitical environment.

RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC GEOPOLITICAL PURSUITS (The case of Syria)

J. Karkazis, P. Siousiouras & D. Kostopoulos (March 2020)

It is worth to note that in some American maps of the Region, the Great Kurdistan extends from northeastern Syria to northwestern Iran and up to northeastern parts of Turkey (Rizus province), the latter evidently planned to form a state 'barrier' against possible Russia's plans. It also serves the further enhancement of diplomatic and economic relations with Cyprus and the continuous and decisive support of Tehran's theocratic regime and Damascus' reforming Allewite regime ([4], [5]).

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The defense of its military footholds in Syria which supervise the geo-strategic spots of Syrian Gates and Cyprus. It is strongly believed that this constitutes a 'red line' of strategic priority for Moscow (evidently fully understood by U.S., Israel and Britain but not fully by Turkey) and they are going to defend them at any cost (not excluding land forces deployment as a remote possibility). Indicative of the geo-strategic importance of Russian footholds in Syria is the declination of Russia (according to many newspaper reports) to discuss a proposal made by the government of Cyprus, offering a naval base in the island as a strong incentive for a Russian loan. Note that Moscow does not possess adequate naval forces in the Mediterranean to defend such a foothold in Cyprus. Furthermore, such a pursuit on behalf of Moscow would clash with the vital geo-strategic interests of Britain in Cyprus. In contrast with a naval base in Cyprus, in the context of a 'worst case' scenario (and under the 'red line' assumption) Moscow could easier defend its Syrian footholds by land and air forces. Furthermore, the establishment of a base in Cyprus would automatically weaken Moscow's will to defend diplomatically or/and military its footholds in Syria.

In: THE PURSUIT OF A NEW ORDER IN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST (June 2011)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339487635_THE_PURSUIT_OF_A_NEW_ORDER_IN_EUROPE_AND_THE_MIDDLE_EAST

THE DYNAMICS OF TERRORISM AND SOCIAL UNREST AND THEIR IMPACT ON A FUTURE REGIONAL CRISIS. THE CASE OF SYRIA

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Abstract. In the first part of this paper (chapters 1 and 2) we introduce a multi-criteria assessment of factors causing widespread and sustainable social unrest which is applied to a group of 14 countries in the Region: Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In the second part of it (chapters 3 to 6) the special profiles of Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, with respect to social unrest and terrorism, are presented and analyzed.

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes two critical issues for the region of Middle East and North Africa (or simply the Region), namely terrorism and social unrest. These issues are the product of an interaction of social discontent (which is due to a widespread sense of injustice and socio-economic inequalities and to the stress caused by economic hardships and deprivation of political, national and religious rights) with particular social, political and religious features of the societies as a whole or of certain marginal segments of them.

The Region is in a transitional period of rapid and deep economic, social and political transformations. These rapid and abrupt transformations create shocks which cannot be smoothly absorbed by the people of it who had lived for more than 1500 years under the old (Roman and Ottoman) order until the collapse of the latter 90 years ago. During that very long period of time, the old order offered the people of the Region some sense of security, more or less constant rules of the political and economic game and a foreseeable future in contrast with the sense of intense insecurity offered by the chaotic socio-economic and political environment of this transitional period. As a result of the above transitional anomalies, the pursuit of a new order for the Region is an issue of strategic importance for the powers having interests in it.

In view of the above remarks, terrorism and social unrest are expected to play an important role in the evolution of events leading to the forthcoming regional crisis which (crisis) will accelerate the course towards the new order. The intensity and the direction of the impact of the above two social phenomena on the geo-political dynamics in the Region will be determined by their natural synergy and interaction with the general socio-political trends in the region and the possible exploitation of them by competing interests inside and outside the Region.

The December 2008 riots in Greece offered a valuable test case for those interested to study the dynamics (the exploitation mechanisms included) of social unrest. It is widely accepted that the causes of the Greek riots of 2008 and of the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, Yemeni and Syrian riots two years later had common causes: socio-economic disparities, poverty, unemployment, corruption and lack of trusted and efficient democratic institutions to various degrees of course for each one of the above countries.^[22,23]

Another common feature of the above riots was their dissemination mainly through the mass use of new technologies of communication (internet and mobile phones). In the case of Greek riots in less than two weeks after the start of riots in Athens these had been spread out in more than 25 cities throughout Greece and in more than 70 cities around the world in the form of solidarity demonstrations^[24]. Almost the same (time) dissemination pattern was also observed in the spreading of the riots in Tunisia and in Egypt.

An aspect of social unrest, which has not yet extensively studied, is the sustainability of it. This paper focuses on this crucial aspect (second chapter).

In the second chapter of this paper an approach for a multi-criteria assessment of factors causing widespread and sustainable social unrest is presented and applied to a group of 14 countries in the Region: Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. These countries will be thereon called Comparative countries

In the following 4 chapters (3d to 5th) the special profiles of Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, with respect to social unrest and terrorism, are presented and analyzed.

2. A multi-criteria assessment of social unrest

In this chapter we introduce a multi-criteria approach for the analysis of the phenomenon of social unrest, focusing on three basic aspects of it: eruption, dissemination and sustainability. The selection of the criteria of this approach is confined to the available credible world statistics. Greece and thirteen more Middle East and North Africa countries are assessed (table 1).

2.1 Social discontent criteria assessment

Regarding the aspect of eruption of social unrest we employ the following group of three criteria determining the severity of social discontent and consequently the possibility (risk) of social unrest: Unemployment, Poverty and Corruption (table 1).

TABLE 1. Social Discontent Criteria

UNEMPLOYMENT		POVERTY		CORRUPTION
Yemen (H)	35.0	Yemen (H)	Iran (H)	0.45
Libya (H)	30.0	Lebanon (H)	Yemen (H)	0.45
Iran (M)	14.6	Israel (M)	Libya (H)	0.45
Tunisia (M)	14.0	Algeria (M)	Syria (M)	0.40
Jordan (M)	13.4	Saudi (M)	Lebanon (M)	0.40
Turkey (M)	12.4	Greece (M)	Egypt (M)	0.36
Greece (M)	12.0	Egypt (M)	Algeria (M)	0.34
Saudi (M)	10.8	Iran (L)	Morocco (M)	0.29
Algeria (L)	9.9	Turkey (L)	Greece (M)	0.286
Morocco (L)	9.8	Morocco (L)	Tunisia (L)	0.23
Egypt (L)	9.7	Jordan (L)	Turkey (L)	0.227
Lebanon (L)	9.2	Syria (L)	Jordan (L)	0.21
Syria (L)	8.3	Libya (L)	Saudi (L)	0.21
Israel (L)	6.4	Tunisia (L)	Israel (L)	0.16

The above criteria express the intensity of the sense of socio-economic inequalities felt by and of the economic stress imposed on the non privileged groups of the society. The source of unemployment (% of total population) and poverty (% of population below poverty level) criterion values was the 2010 CIA Fact Book. In particular, Lebanon's unemployment figure for 2010 was taken from http://www.indexmundi.com/lebanon/unemployment_rate.html.

The source of corruption criterion values is the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of the 2010 Report of Transparency International. Note that CPI expresses the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians.^[20] According to Transparency International, corruption is "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain".^[21] Since original CPI figures are directly related to the notion of 'transparency' they increase in straight analogy with the level of transparency in a country. The corruption criterion values employed here are reversely analogous to CPI figures (1/CPI figure) ranging in the interval [0.16 for Israel, the least corrupted country - 0.45 for Iran, the most corrupted country]. The above transformation does not alter ranking and distributional characteristics of CPI figures.

The values of the above three criteria are classified as "high", "medium" and "low" on the basis of their ranked position and of the deviations among them with the aim to create distinct and meaningful classification groups. This approach will be also followed in the other two groups of assessment criteria.

High risk countries

On the basis of the above qualitative categorization of criteria values, the countries under assessment are classified into the following three (more or less) equally sized groups: "high risk", "medium risk" and "low risk" countries.

The countries which attain at least one "high" value and at most one "low" value (in the above three-criterion assessment) form the group of "high risk" countries as explosion of social unrest is concerned (table 1a).

TABLE 1a. Social unrest explosion: high risk countries

Yemen	HHH	VH
Libya	HLH	H
Iran	MLH	MH
Lebanon	LHM	MH

The countries of the above group are further characterized as running a "very high" (VH), "high" (H) and "moderately high" (MH) risk on the basis of their individual rankings attained in the above three criteria assessment (column 2 of table 1a).

Low risk countries

On the basis of the above categorization of criteria values, the countries which attain at least two "low" values form the group of "low risk" countries as explosion of social unrest is concerned (table 1b).

TABLE 1b. Social unrest explosion: low risk countries

Syria	LLM	VL
Morocco	LLM	VL
Israel	LML	VL
Tunisia	MLL	L
Turkey	MLL	L

The countries of the above group are further characterized as running a “very low” (VL) and “low” (L) risk on the basis of their individual rankings attained in the above three criteria assessment (column 2 of table 1b).

2.2 News compilation and dissemination assessment

The second group of criteria introduced in this paper regards the news compilation and dissemination rate which, in turn, influences the social unrest dissemination. These criteria are: Internet Coverage, Freedom of Press and Urbanization (table 2). The first criterion refers to internet users per 100 inhabitants and expresses the power of mass technologies of communication to disseminate news worldwide. The source of relevant values is the Internet World Statistics for 2010. The second criterion refers to Press Freedom Index (PFI) for 2010. PFI gives an annual ranking of countries compiled and published by the organization of Reporters Without Borders. As reported by *Wikipedia* (: *Press Freedom Index*) PFI is based upon a “survey asking questions about direct attacks on journalists and the media as well as other indirect sources of pressure against the free press”. Since original PFI figures are directly related to the “attacks” on press these figures are reversely analogous to the level of press freedom enjoyed in a country. To establish a straight analogy between the values employed by this criterion and the press freedom levels we use instead the following transformed figures: $1/PFI$. These figures range within the interval [0.053 for Greece, the country with the most free press – 0.011 for Iran, the country with the least free press]. The third criterion (urbanization) refers to a measure of public proximity to mass gathering facilities which can be found only in urban areas. This type of mass social proximity acts as an amplifier of the socio-political signals derived during the compilation and dissemination of news, especially political ones.

TABLE 2. News Dissemination Criteria

INTERNET COVERAGE		URBANIZATION		PRESS FREEDOM	
Israel (H)	71.6	Israel (H)		Greece (H)	0.053
Greece (H)	46.2	Lebanon (H)		Lebanon (H)	0.049
Turkey (H)	45.0	Saudi (H)		Israel (H)	0.043
Iran (H)	43.2	Libya (M)		Jordan (M)	0.027
Saudi (M)	38.1	Jordan (M)		Egypt (M)	0.023
Tunisia (M)	34.0	Turkey (M)		Algeria (M)	0.021
Morocco (M)	33.0	Iran (M)		Morocco (M)	0.021
Jordan (M)	27.2	Tunisia (M)		Turkey (M)	0.020
Lebanon (M)	24.2	Algeria (M)		Saudi (L)	0.016
Egypt (M)	21.2	Greece (M)		Libya (L)	0.016
Syria (L)	17.7	Morocco (L)		Tunisia (L)	0.014
Algeria (L)	13.6	Syria (L)		Yemen (L)	0.012
Libya (L)	5.5	Egypt (L)		Syria (L)	0.011
Yemen (L)	1.8	Yemen (L)		Iran (L)	0.011

High risk countries

On the basis of the above qualitative categorization of criteria values, the countries under assessment are classified into the following three groups: “high risk”, “medium risk” and “low risk” countries.

The countries which attain at least one “high” value and at most one “low” value (in the above three-criterion assessment) form the group of “high risk” countries as dissemination of social unrest is concerned (table 2a).

TABLE 2a. Social unrest dissemination: high risk countries

Israel	HHH	VH
Greece	HMH	H
Lebanon	MHH	H
Turkey	HMM	MH
Saudi	MHL	MH
Iran	HML	MH

The countries of the above group are further characterized as running a “very high” (VH), “high” (H) and “moderately high”(MH) risk on the basis of their individual rankings attained in the above three criteria assessment (column 2 of table 2a).

Low risk countries

On the basis of the above categorization of criteria values, the countries which attain at least two “low” values form the group of “low risk” countries as dissemination of social unrest is concerned (table 2b).

TABLE 2b. Social unrest dissemination: low risk countries

Yemen	LLL	VL
Syria	LLL	VL
Libya	LML	L

The countries of the above group are further characterized as running a “very low” (VL) and “low” (L) risk on the basis of their individual rankings attained in the above three criteria (column 2 of table 2b).

2.3 Social unrest defusing capabilities assessment

The aspect of sustainability of social unrest depends mainly on the capability of the political system of a country to defuse tensions and solve the problems causing the social unrest. Well established democratic institutions and a free press are the primal mechanisms for undertaking free and creative “discussions” within a society which, as a rule, lead to a consensus on solutions of problems causing social discontent and as a consequence they defuse social unrest. On the other hand, the lack of such institutions makes the solutions of such problems much more difficult, contributing in this way to the sustainability of social unrest. Furthermore, the educational level of the citizens, involved in such “discussions” and decisions, determines to a large degree their quality and effectiveness and as a consequence the ‘education’ factor is crucial for the defuse of social unrest.

On the basis of the above analysis, the following three criteria are employed for the assessment of social unrest defusing capabilities: Freedom of Press (as in the previous case), Democracy Index (DI) for 2010 and Education Index (EI) for 2007 (the most recent available data). DI is an index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit .As reported by *Wikipedia (: Democracy Index)* “Democracy Index measures the state of democracy in 167 countries. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture”. EI is compiled by U.N. in its annual Human Development Reports. As reported by *Wikipedia (: Education Index)* “Education Index is measured by the adult literacy rate (with two-thirds weighting) and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrollment ratio (with one-third weighting). The adult literacy rate gives an indication of the ability to read and write, while the GER gives an indication of the level of education from kindergarten to postgraduate education” (table 3).

TABLE 3. Social Unrest Defusing Capabilities Criteria

PRESS FREEDOM		DEMOCRACY INDEX		EDUCATION INDEX	
Greece (H)	0.053	Greece (H)	7.92	Greece (H)	0.981
Lebanon (H)	0.049	Israel (H)	7.48	Israel (H)	0.947
Israel (H)	0.043	Lebanon (M)	5.82	Libya (M)	0.898
Jordan (M)	0.027	Turkey (M)	5.73	Lebanon (M)	0.875
Egypt (M)	0.023	Morocco (L)	3.79	Jordan (M)	0.870
Algeria (M)	0.021	Jordan (L)	3.74	Turkey (M)	0.828
Morocco (M)	0.021	Algeria (L)	3.44	Saudi (M)	0.828
Turkey (M)	0.020	Egypt (L)	3.07	Iran (M)	0.793
Saudi (L)	0.016	Tunisia (L)	2.79	Syria (M)	0.773
Libya (L)	0.016	Yemen (L)	2.64	Tunisia (M)	0.772
Tunisia (L)	0.014	Syria (L)	2.31	Algeria (M)	0.748
Yemen (L)	0.012	Libya (L)	1.94	Egypt (L)	0.697
Syria (L)	0.011	Iran (L)	1.94	Yemen (L)	0.579
Iran (L)	0.011	Saudi (L)	1.84	Morocco (L)	0.574

High risk countries

In the context of the previous categorization of criteria values, the countries which attain at least two “low” values (in the above three-criteria assessment of social unrest defusing capabilities) form the group of “high risk” countries as sustainability of social unrest is concerned (table 3a).

TABLE 3a. Social unrest sustainability: high risk countries

Yemen	LLL	VH
Iran	LLM	H
Syria	LLM	H
Libya	LLM	H
Tunisia	LLM	H
Egypt	MLL	H

The countries of the above group are further characterized as running a “very high” (VH) and “high” (H) risk on the basis of their individual rankings attained in the above three criteria assessment (column 2 of table 3a).

Low risk countries

On the basis of the above categorization of criteria values, the countries which attain at least one “high” value and at most one “low” value form the group of “low risk” countries as sustainability of social unrest is concerned (table 3b).

TABLE 3b. Social unrest sustainability: low risk countries

Greece	HHH	VL
Israel	HHH	VL
Lebanon	HMM	L

The countries of the above group are further characterized as running a “very low” (VL) and “low” (L) risk on the basis of their individual rankings attained in the above three criteria assessment (column 2 of table 2b).

2.4 Overall assessment

On the basis of the above multi-criteria analysis, the only country characterized by a high risk for all three groups of criteria is Iran. Actually Iran runs a moderately high risk both for social unrest explosion and social unrest dissemination and a high risk of social unrest sustainability. Consequently Iran runs a high risk for regime collapse.

3. The case of Syria

3.1 Social cohesion

Population: 22 millions (2010)^[10]

3.1.1 Ethnic cohesion^[10,12,13,14]

Arabs account for 80% of population, Kurds for 9%, Syriacs (Christians) for 5% (4.2-6.4%), Turkmen for 5% (3.5-6.5%) and Armenians for 1%.

Kurds are residing in the northeastern part of the country.

Turkmen are mainly residing in the cities of Aleppo, Damascus and Latakia.

3.1.2 Religious cohesion^[15]

Muslims account for 87% of the population and Christians for 10%.

The predominant sects of Muslims are: Sunni, accounting for 74% of the population and the Shia for 13% of it. Alawis is the predominant sect among the Shia Muslims of Syria (6% of population).

The predominant sect of Christians is: Antiochian Orthodox

Christians are mainly residing in the north and northeastern parts of the country.

Alawis are mainly residing in the northwestern coastal Al Ladhiqiyah region where they represent 60% of the rural population.

3.2 Government

Syria is a presidential single party republic.

According to the constitution the President should be Muslim. The constitution, on the other hand, does not specify that Islam is the state religion.

The parliament of Syria has 250 members. The National Progressive Front (dominated by the Arab socialist Baath Party) has 169 members and the rest 81 members are independent.

Its regime is classified by the Economist Intelligence Unit as “authoritarian”.

3.3 Social unrest dynamics

The main security problem for Syria is the Kurdish Issue.

In 1965 the government of Syria decided to create an Arab cordon in the predominantly Kurdish region of Al-Hasakah, along the borders with Turkey, by relocating hundreds of thousands of Kurds, by Arabizing village names and by prohibiting Kurdish dress.

In demonstrations that took place in 1986 four Kurds were killed, whereas in riots that erupted in 2004 thirty civilians (most of them Kurds) were killed and hundreds were arrested. Amnesty International reported that Syrian authorities subjected to torture many Kurds. According to Kurdistan National Assembly (an illegal Kurdish organization in Syria) the Kurds account for 15-20% of the population of Syria.

3.3.1 Social discontent (risk of social unrest)

Population below poverty criterion:

value: 11.9%, classification: **low**, ranking: 12

Corruption perception index criterion:

value: 0.40, classification: **medium**, ranking: 4

Unemployment criterion:

value: 8.3%, classification: **low**, ranking: 13

Risk of social unrest: very low

(the lowest together with Morocco in the group of the five low risk countries)

3.3.2 News dissemination (risk of social unrest dissemination)

Internet users criterion:

value: 17.7%, classification: **low**, ranking: 11

Press freedom index criterion:

value: 0.11, classification: **low**, ranking: 13

Urbanization criterion:

value: 54%, classification: **low**, ranking: 12

Risk of social unrest dissemination: very low

(the lowest together with Yemen in the group of the seven low risk countries)

3.3.3 Social unrest defusing capabilities (risk of social unrest sustainability)

Educational index:

value: 0.773, classification: **medium**, ranking: 9

Press freedom index criterion: as above

Democracy Index:

value: 2.31, classification: **low**, ranking: 11

Social unrest sustainability: high

(the 2nd highest in the group of the 6 countries with high risk of social unrest sustainability)

Syria's Democracy Index, 2.31, is very low (actually the 4th lowest among the 14 comparative countries, after Saudi Arabia, Iran and Libya). Due to the lack of democratic institutions Syria will be unable to absorb easily the shocks created by a social unrest explosion. Syria's authoritarian regime has limited degrees of freedom and option alternatives (mainly emanating from its "myopic" political features) to cope with social unrest. In such a case it is expected that the regime will resort to violent and repressive methods and policies which will create feed back effects on social unrest making it uncontrollable.

3.3.4 Insurrection and regime collapse risk

The above multi-criteria analysis shows that Syria is characterized by a **low risk for social unrest explosion**, by a **low risk for dissemination of social unrest** and also by **very low capabilities to defuse social unrest** (if this reaches critical levels). The prospect of wide spread social unrest, which may escalate to the level of insurrection, is related primarily to the Kurdish minority of the country. If unrest in this powerful minority erupts (probably through an exogenous spark) then it is very probable that this will spread quickly, through social “osmosis”, to other groups of the population, mainly to the large Christians minorities.

3.4 Radical and terrorist organizations

Syria is a country that hosts and/or supports militant and terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, Abu Musa Organization and others and at the same time is a country which has suffered from terrorism.

3.4.1 Sunni radicalism and terrorism during 1965-1985^[2]

During the period 1976-1981 the Sunni Islamists under the guidance of the Syrian branch of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) fought the government controlled by the Baath Party (an Islamic socialist political organization) in what has been called “the terror campaign” in which hundreds of civilians were killed. Sunni terrorists primarily targeted prominent Syrians (of the academic and the political spectrum) belonging primarily to the Alawi ruling community which enlists also in its members the current and previous president of Syria. Note that the Alawis is a religious Shia sect not accepted as genuine Muslim by many Islamic organizations.

The most important Sunni fundamentalist radical/terrorist groups, of period 1965-1985, operating under the umbrella of MB of Syria were:

- the Islamic Liberation Movement, established in 1963 with headquarters in Aleppo
- the Islamic Liberation Party, founded in Jordan in 1956
- the Jundallah (Soldiers of God) and
- the Fighting Vanguard established in 1965 in Hamah and led since 1987 by Adnan Ughah

During the period 1976-1985 MB staged a plethora of attacks against the Baath regime of Syria, assassinating around 700 middle-level government officials and members of the security forces and about 24 Soviet advisers. In 1980 MB organized a full-scale insurrection in Aleppo. The Syrian government crushed the rebellion by responding fiercely and out of proportion: 20.000 civilians (mostly Sunni rebellion supporters) and militants were killed and a large part of the city was destroyed. Sunni militants repeated a full-scale rebellion in 1982, this time in Hamah. As in the case of Aleppo, the Syrian regime ruthlessly crushed the new rebellion by sending forces which killed 10.000-25.000 civilians and destroyed large parts of the city. Following these new insurrection Syrian authorities tightened even further anti-terrorist measures and made the membership in MB a capital offense. The above traumatic events led to world-wide uproar against the regime. In an effort to improve its image the Syrian regime introduced reform measures and in 1985 the Syrian government announced an amnesty for MB during which 500 members of it were released from prison.

3.4.2 Radical/terrorist organizations sponsored by Syria

- Hezbollah receives financial and political support from Syria and Iran. It was reported that Hezbollah possesses Scud missiles which were provided by Syria. These reports were denied by Syria.^[1]

- Hammas highest decision making body, the Political Bureau (consisting of 15 members), operates in exile in Damascus. Its leader is Khaled Meshaal. Israeli sources estimate that the military wing of Hammas, the Hammas Brigades, have a core of several hundred members receiving military style training in Syria and Iran. Both, Hezbollah and Hammas, are designated as terrorist organizations among other countries by USA and Israel.

- The Islamic Jihad Movement of Palestine, a Palestinian terrorist group, is currently based in the Syrian capital, Damascus, having also offices in Beirut, Tehran and Khartoum. It is believed that it receives financial backing from Syria and Iran. Its theater of operations is Gaza and West Bank but operates also in Lebanon and Jordan.

- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Palestinian national organization backed by Syria and Iran, is considered as a terrorist organization by more than 30 countries including EU, Israel and USA. His leader (secretary general) is Ahmed Jibril, a former military officer of the Syrian army. The organization has acted as a Syrian proxy during the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and also during the Lebanon civil war. It has limited political influence in Palestinian politics but it is influential in the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria.

3.4.3 Post -2000 terrorist attacks

2004: 5 people were killed (among them 3 gunmen terrorists) during a terrorist attack in the diplomatic quarters of Damascus

2006: 10 people were killed (among them 7 gunmen terrorists) during a terrorist attack against US Embassy in Damascus and the Syrian National Television

2008: at least 17 people were killed by a bomb in the outskirts of Damascus which had probably as target an important Shia shrine and a security post which were near the site of the explosion

2009: at least three people were killed by a bomb planted in a bus in a suburb of Damascus which is popular for Iranian and Shia pilgrims

3.5 Regional crisis impact

Syria exerts a rather significant political influence in Lebanon through Hezbollah which can be exploited in the case of a regional crisis to exert limited military pressure on Israel. On the other hand, its backward economy and its inefficient military apparatus, in combination with the exhibited decisiveness of Israel to draw an “iron curtain” between Syria and its allies (Hezbollah and Iran) highly reduce the possibilities of a whole-hearted and massive mobilization of its forces and of its military options. In the case in which the “Mideast borders redrawing scenario” is the main strategic option of the New Order designs in the region, Syria runs the risk of a massive Kurdish revolt in its northeastern regions and the subsequent highly possible intervention of Peshmerga forces in support of their brother Syrian Kurds. This is expected to happen under the condition of the emergence of a favorable for the Kurds military environment. Based on the assumption that the Peshmerga forces amount to 370.000 soldiers (as has been reported by CBS News) then the Kurds could mobilize

forces and fight at two fronts simultaneously. In the case in which Turkey will not employ the option of a full-scale military intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan then Peshmerga is expected to transfer the main part of its forces to the eastern front (Persian Kurdistan, to initiate a guerrilla war and organize the resistance of local Kurds) and a smaller force to the western front (northeastern Syria), leaving in northern Kurdistan forces capable of defending it against small-scale attacks by Turkish commando forces. In such case is very probable that Turkish forces will cross the borders with Syria to assist the Syrian army in its fight against the Kurds. The recent (1/3/2011) joint military exercises between Turkey and Syria^[16] with Turkish forces crossing the borders with Syria are compatible with the above scenario. This hypothetical event might bring forward the extremely dangerous prospect of a direct military confrontation between Israel and Turkey in the case in which Israeli air forces attack Turkish army units operating in Syria, a prospect which will accelerate New Order designs related to Turkey. In view of "Mideast borders redrawing scenario" and more specifically with reference to Colonel Ralph Peters Middle East map, in which northeastern parts of Syria are incorporated in the Kurdish State, one cannot easily exclude the possibility that the Alexandretta Issue and the relevant territorial claims of Syria, which are now in a state of diplomatic hypnosis, will be used as the antidote against the reactions of Syria.

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Appendix 1

Bartlett & Pry Theory

The Washington Times

BARTLETT & PRY: What if Iran already has the bomb?

Better to be prepared than surprised

By Rep. Roscoe G. Bartlett and Peter Vincent Pry

The Washington Times

6:12 p.m., Monday, August 2, 2010

“...History suggests that we may already be too late to stop Iran’s Islamic bomb. The U.S. Manhattan Project, when the A-bomb was merely a theoretical possibility, secretly used 1940s-era technology to produce two atomic bombs of radically different designs - in just three years. Moreover, during those three years, the United States secretly developed the vast industrial nuclear-weapons infrastructure that quickly built hundreds of bombs during the early Cold War.

Israel is credited with clandestinely developing a large and highly sophisticated nuclear arsenal, all without nuclear testing. We know from Mordecai Vanunu, who defected from Israel’s nuclear-weapons program, and according to the respected Wisconsin Project, that Israel has hundreds of nuclear weapons, including neutron and thermonuclear warheads. Yet Israel has a population only the size of Baltimore and lacks the oil wealth of Iran.

Why do we suppose Iran cannot accomplish in 20 years of trying - with access to vast amounts of unclassified data on nuclear-weapons design and equipped with 21st-century technology - what the U.S. accomplished in three years during the 1940s? Why do we suppose that Iran, with resources vastly superior to Israel’s, and helped by Russia, China and North Korea, cannot match or surpass Israel’s nuclear-weapons feat?...”

THE ARAB RIOTS-REVOLUTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT

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1. Historical overview of modern Arab history

The Arabs¹, who live in the same geographic area share the same language and culture, but they have no collective economic power and cooperation between them as a nation². Also, they are divided by political boundaries which were delineated after the First World War at the famous agreement (Sykes-Picot) in 1916, between France and Great Britain. When the Ottomans finally withdrew from the arabic area (1516-1918), the two European powers occupied the region from 1918 to 1946 .

So since then they have been divided into 22 states and the political and economic gap between those states is enormous.

The independence of most Arab countries after the Second World War marked the beginning of the democratic period in the Arab world. However, this period was accompanied by the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948. Most Arabs in the region believe that Israel has replaced the colonial world powers. The failure of Arab armies in the 1948 war against Israel ended in the new period of the democratic forces in the Arab countries, because they were held responsible for the defeat in the war of 1948 from Israel. So the new military regimes ruled in most Arabic countries until the time of the Arab spring. Dividing the world into East and West , in the period of cold war,

¹ The Arab world is a massive geopolitical and cultural entity between three continents. The Arabs have three basic elements of a strong state: The Arab population was 318.3 million in 2006, with a pervasive pattern of youth. Oil, gas and other natural resources make the Arab people one of the richest on the planet. The confirmed oil reserves are 57% of world reserves and 29.5% of natural gas. Finally, the area of Arab space reaching 14.2 million square kilometers, that is 10.2% of the total area of land. The Arabs control large territories, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian-Arabian Gulf and they control important trade routes like the Suez Canal, the Strait of Aden and the Strait of Hormus.

² The council which was established between the arabic countries of Maghreb during the decade of 1980 remained in theory because of the national conflict i.e between Morocco and Algeria for Western Sahara. The Arab Cooperation Council between Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen failed because the national policy of each country, for instance the decision of Saddam to invade Kuwait paralyzed this united effort. The Gulf Cooperation Council has as its central axis the security sector, the Gulf states have invited Morocco and Jordan to join as members because of the “expansionist” policy of Iran mainly on the issue of Bahrain . This council unable to achieve economic integration and implementing the single currency, for example the Arab Emirates withdrew from the single currency. The power of each state is based on the amount of oil production and external partnerships with major powers.

³ Despite the promises of establishing a single Arab state in return for the participation of Arabs in A. World War against the Turks, In this agreement the two great powers divided the Arab-speaking areas which were a part of the Eastern question. For the contents of the Agreement Sykes-Picot see George Antonius, *The Arab awakening*, Simon Publications 2001, p. 428-430. Also see Longgrig, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, Octagon books, New York, 1972 p. 56-59.

led to the separation of the Arabs in several political, social and economic categories. Both the Arab followers of the West (USA) and the followers of the East (ex-Soviet Union), failed to win not only freedom but also to create a democratic system and failed to bring effective constant development and productive economies. So other problems accumulated affecting the Arabic people.

The Palestinian issue was the Achilles heel of the Arab states. Despite the great defeat of 1967 and the consequences of the war of 1973, the first collective effort of Arab countries was made to confront the new challenges and the full western support to Israel, which was using oil as a weapon against Europe and the USA. Moreover, the wars between Arabs and Israelis (1948-1967-1973-1982) exhausted the national economies of the region, while the social, economic and political conditions slowly started to change for citizens of the arabic area.

The signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 at camp David was the biggest breach the Arab front. This agreement was unilateral and did not give a definitive end to the Arab-Israeli conflict and led Egypt to the exit from the Arab League, whose headquarters moved to Tunisia. Furthermore, the signing of the peace agreement marked the end of the selection of war as the Arabic negotiating instrument against Israel, because Egypt neutralized as the largest power in the Arabic world

The invading forces of Saddam Hussein in Kuwait in 1990 was a severe blow which caused the Splitting of the Arab camp and the change of the Arabic system. Also the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 is designated as a landmark for the reshaping of the balance power in the Arab region. The immediate presence of a superpower in the Arab region has caused an intense feeling of insecurity from fear to change the map of the region after the violent fall of the Iraqi regime .

2. The age of Arab Spring

For the responsibility of the political situation in the Arab world there are internal factors and external factors that are related to the external intervention of great powers in the internal affairs of Arabic countries.

The internal changes in the Arab countries occurred after the 1967 war, when the Arabic regimes suffered a great loss. The middle class lost its role as the driving force of evolution . Regimes implemented harsh measures to silence the opposition, condemned their people to poverty, supported the low level media, brought up a new mutated and corrupt generation and ruled their people with an iron fist by the tremendous, secret intelligence and military law. What is more, the Arab regimes applied inhumane torture against political prisoners and the missing file in several states is one of the most important files that need to emerge to the surface.

The riots from the site of regimes show the excessive use of force and abuse of human rights in dealing with demonstrators. Dozens of demonstrators were killed every day in Libya, Yemen, Syria⁴, Iraq but in the case of Egypt and Tunisia, things were approximately better on the outcome of the revolution. Negative reports of human rights organizations of the UN had come for several Arab countries but Arabic regimes or leaders are not interested in doing anything to change the situation of their people.

⁴ See the Human Right Watch of United Nations for Syria “Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria”

The riots have highlighted the tragic economic situation because of poverty⁵, unemployment, and increasing rate of economy ⁶ which is prevailing in Arab societies. The cost of corruption in the Arab countries amounted to \$ 40 billion annually⁷. Also, one fourth of the Arabic population lives below the poverty line. This number differs in the Gulf countries. The protesters of arabic spring claim the insurgency primarily to cover their economic needs and improve their living and political conditions. Additionally, the Arab media and spiritualism in the countries of the Arabic Spring have no freedom to express themselves as they are silenced by censorship.

The Arab Planning Institute confirms that the unemployment rate in 2006 reached 15% of the Arab workforce and it estimates that by 2020 the Arab unemployment will exceed 19 million⁸. But several Arab economists disagree with these figures and consider that the real numbers are much higher⁹. The problem of unemployment will be worse if new future crisis appears. Regarding education there is a large portion of people who are illiterate. This phenomenon is due to different factors such as rapid population growth, which makes all the developmental state programs fail because the annual population growth rate is 4.8%. According to the studies of Arab Financial Services, the percentage of illiterate people who are over 18 years was approximately 36% of the Arab population, mainly among women because of inequality between men and women. Clearly, this number varies from country to country. Also there are great responsibilities charged to all the Arab regimes about the matter of education where the deliberate reduction of the educational level is a political tool to control people.

Regarding external factors, the Arab area was a part of the Eastern Question which related to property and heritage of the Ottoman Empire before its dissolution in 1918. The major European powers were planning the future of Arab countries according to their interests. There are several documents of European Orientalists who visited the Arab world on behalf of their governments and recorded their observations about the Arab world or arabic nation prior to the withdrawal of the Ottomans. These documents confirm the western interest in the Arab region. Since the Second World War until 1990 the Cold War moved to the Arab world thus dividing the Arabs into two camps. So the Arab region faced extraordinary pressures and interventions mostly European and American, to stop the Arab governments of any plan or attempt of unification and economic integration. Also the requirements of foreigners from the Arab regimes have reached the point of disallowing severe economic cooperation between Arabs. Foreign operations, arising from their interests and related to oil, full support to Israel and the geopolitical position of the Arab world, led to a solution of the Arab world and the existence of authoritarian regimes in most parts of the world. The perpetuation of the Arab population fragmentation coupled with the retention of these authoritarian regimes. In addition,

⁵ The factor of poverty is common in many countries. In Syria, the UN estimates show that at least 30% of 23 million live below the poverty line. Studies Centre Aljazeera, «The horizons of the Syrian revolution" (3/28/11) (Date of access: 30 March 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/F59D1479-E23D-49AC-8C92-B6BE1CF646B8.htm?GoogleStatID=24>.

⁶ In the case of precision the global crisis has worsened the situation because of rising commodity prices internationally.

⁷ Aljazeera.net, "The suffering of the Arab people and the horizons of change" (1/30/11) (Date of access: 16 February 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/3B0F08D6-F0B3-4A37-92CA-B85DC19B5C47.htm>.

According to the study of the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, The Mubarak regime wasted (during 1982-2010) the amount of \$ 185 billion of the total amount of 213 billion. Money of foreign aid to Egypt, Alarabiya.net (06/20/11) (Date of access: 20 June 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/06/20/154013.html>

⁸ Aljazeera.net, "The crisis of unemployment is alarming in the Arab world" (16.2.11) (Date of access: 01 May 2011).<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/1E511753-9939-44F3-A42C-EB2BE02C7E61.htm>

⁹ These numbers differ from one country to another in the arabic area but it is clear that the uprising Arab countries' unemployment is quite high. One major reason for unemployment in these countries is their failure to achieve growth rates above 5%. For instance the case of Yemen. Aljazeera.net, "Unemployment among young people in Yemen is 50%" (30/9/11) (Date of access: 1Maiou 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7C049051-6586-45C0-AC43-7C3D8AC8133E.htm>.

the strategic interests of Europeans and Americans turned out to be a serious obstacle to any attempt of unification of the Arab nation. Because of external intervention and authoritarian Arab regimes caused to appear an upsurge internal and external terrorism as a desperate attempt against the colonial forces and authoritarian regimes¹⁰.

Any unifying effort and resolution of disputes inside Arabs through the establishment of the Arabic League from 1947¹¹ until the start of the Arab spring, failed because of non-binding decisions of the League, the lack of control mechanism, the strong local nationalism in each country from 22 and the line of foreign policy which ensued and finally the role of major powers in the weakening of the Arabic League¹².

3. Conclusion

With the return of democracy, which was a prerogative of Europe and America, to the Arab world, the contemporary political Islamist movements and parties will have a leading role with their modern profiles to have different attitudes toward the West. This victory was given to any clean election, because of the social service networks that have been formed for decades and were close to the various social classes. Apart from this, the secular, liberal and the left-side parties in the countries of the Arab Spring had been converted in recent years to superficial virtual parties, because they were far from the reality of the every day life of the simple people and did not show the necessary respect for the traditions and the faith of the people of the Arab spring. In addition, the worst thing of the liberal parties that accepted financial aid from Western countries, especially the U.S. with the pretext of supporting democracy.

The Turkish role will be enhanced in the new chessboard of the Middle East. Because the Turkish Party of Justice and Development will be a model for modern Islamist political movements that can govern their country in any democratic election in the Arab states of the Arab spring.

Surely all the Islamic movements will not be winners. For instance, the organization Hezbollah, which gained great popularity among the Arab countries after the 2006 war against Israel as "resistance and liberation movement" has become a much hated organization for the same people because its support of the Assad regime. While it also openly supported all Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain.

Also Iran loses more in case of the Arab spring especially in Syria, which is the gate of Tehran to the Middle East and the Arab world . Furthermore, the possibility of friendiranian organization Hezbollah as a new political force in Lebanon will be restricted after limiting the Iranian role. Beside this, in the new situation it will strengthen the Lebanese groups of Sunnis.

The leadership of Christians in Lebanon will be among the losers because supporting the Syrian regime on the pretext that it fears the replacements will be the Islamists . There are two reasons to be

¹⁰ The fact is that the authoritarian Arab regimes and extremist Islamist organizations type of AlKainda and Al Jihad Al Islami are twins together because everyone gives oxygen to the other. The dictator shows to the West that he fight terrorism to take their support and to justify his stay in power for many years with no elections, while the extreme Islamic organizations show the people that are not afraid of authoritarianism or the West supports to change the status quo

¹¹ Majid Khadduri, «The Arab League as a Regional Arrangement» in the American Journal of International Law, Vol. 39, 1945 p. 864

¹² The attitude of the Arab League in the issue of the Arabic Spring differs in revolution from one another. In the case of Libya the Arab League gave green light to the UN to intervene but in case of Syria its attitude was limited to advice within 7 months and needed killing at least 4000 people inside Syria to move practically . The cases of Yemen and Bahrain were not addressed because the region of the Arabian Peninsula differs from other parts of the Arab world because of oil and the desire of the United States to maintain the Status quo.

explained, the moral and the other is historical. Whether it is ethical and appropriate to support one totalitarian blood regime which has seized power for fifty years and knows that it is undesirable for the majority of its fellow citizens. Also when did Christians of modern Syria (1946-2011) face threats from Islamists in the country?. So it is important to compare between the Baath regime era and the democratic era that preceded the Baath coup and was a characteristic example to the world.

Israel is the first country that is concerned about the climate of instability and the wave of riots that swept the Arab world. The dynamics of Egypt on the chessboard of the Middle East, despite the existence of the Supreme Military Council after the fall of Mubarak, will contribute actively to the interests of Arabs and is a supporter of the Palestinians in the negotiation with the Israelis. The fact is that Israel will face a new reality after the collapse of Arab regimes which were friends with the state of Israel.

The fear that Israel tries to instill about the transformation of the rebel countries to theocratic regimes like the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia is unlikely because of the mentality of these people, contacts and links have been around for years with Western civilized countries and the existence of other political forces whose ideologies are not compatible with the ideology of theocracy.

The lack of peace today is causing political instability and poor economic conditions in most Arab countries and leads to bloodshed between Arabs and Israelis and a bleeding national economy. Peace is the only way to security and stability in the Middle East.

The uprisings in the Arab world have left their traces in other Arab countries and caused a great fear of tipping the other regimes, thus starting the leaders of several Arab countries in a wave of development reforms causing the wrath of the people. In countries like Morocco and Jordan governments gave some privileges to citizens and inhibited increases in commodity prices so as not to revolt. In Algeria, in addition to the above measures, the President announced the suspension of the emergency case¹³. Moreover, the king of Saudi Arabia approved a development package worth \$ 35 billion to support citizens¹⁴. Also he launched the first initiative to establish the first political party in the history of Saudi Arabia . Kuwait approved spending \$ 4 billion to support the masses by offering free food for 14 months to people in need. Furthermore, the President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir categorically stated that he doesn't wish to renew the mandate of the Presidential office in the country. In Jordan the leaders of the Islamic movement's opposition raised the dilemma of reform or the fall of the regime.

In the new situation that has developed the Arab countries need to confront first their internal problems, socially, politically, culturally and economically, in order to follow the path of progress and development. With the uprisings Arab people give an end to hereditary regimes in the region and gain their true identity back and exempt from the negative memories nurtured in years of authoritarian regimes. Perhaps it is the first time in history that the Arab people can govern themselves by themselves, for themselves as defined by the ancient Greek word "democracy." And maybe it is the beginning of the limitation of interventions by the major powers in internal Arab affairs. Moreover, the new progressive arrangements that will emerge will have to work hard to fill the political vacuum which has been created by dictatorial regimes, which was exploited by other

¹³ Algeria is a candidate for rebellion, because the political, economic and social reforms undertaken by President Boteflika not satisfying the majority of the Algerian people. The bloodshed conflict in neighboring Libya and the attitude of France and Spain supplied with natural gas pipelines from Algeria delay the outbreak of the rebellion.

¹⁴ Aljazeera.net, "Saudi Arabia announced an aid package to the citizens of the value of \$ 35 billion." (23/02/11) (Date / Date of access: 20 September 2011) <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/F4C5CD50-E453-457E-8D7A-DE8DF5667DE5.htm>

regional countries (Iran-Turkey) for their national interests also by conservative Islamic movements (Al Salafia).

In addition, the riots will assist in reducing the wave of economic migrants coming to Europe because of poor survival conditions created by the dictatorial regimes in the Arab world. Also the new regimes need a transitional period to be able to operate the new arrangements. In spite of the fact that the transition of period over which the Arab world today is the basis on which new economic policies are adopted and reforms needed to determine the economic future of these countries under the new changes. The stability and security remain key factors in encouraging investment climate.

What is more, the governments of major powers in particular EU and U.S. have to clarify from the beginning their position in relation to the Arab uprisings and to support the insurgent people seeking social justice and freedom of expression and speech and not to expect which of the two sides (people-regime) would acquire the control of choice.

Indeed, although there is little chance of insurgency spreading in oil-producing Arab Gulf countries, the phenomenon can take place and therefore could cause instability again to the world economies due to the instability that prevailed after each revolution, until the new political system will emerge and stabilized.

Lastly, it should also be noted that the decisive role of the media in these uprisings, such as the Internet and Arabic satellite channels like Aljazeera, which gave light and hope to start changing political conditions in the Arab world.

Finally, the Arab people of the region changed page and formed a new roadmap for the future. But the success of the Arab spring depends on the success of the Syrian revolt to overthrow the Assad dynasty. Otherwise, the Arab spring will be limited.

RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND SYRIA AND THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS

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Summary: In this article is made a historical analysis of relations between Syria and Iran since the takeover by the cleric leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 until today. Is an analysis of the factors of rapprochement between the two countries and the main political and economic evolutions. An extensive study is also made on the role of Iran in the Syrian crisis and the challenges it faces. Also it is recorded the concerns of Arab countries and Turkey from the Iranian role, and finally explains why Syria is so important for the Islamic Republic of Iran and what are the consequences of the fall of the Syrian regime in Tehran.

Keywords: Syria, Iran, Turkey, crisis, rebellion, Assad, Hezbollah, Hamas Alaouites, Shiites, strategic cooperation, Arab spring, Al Kouds Force, military intervention, conflict.

1. Historical review

The deterioration between the two wings of the party Baath Iraq and Syria, particularly between the Sunni Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the Alaouiti Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, the rise to power in 1979 of the Head of Islamic revolution Ayatollah Khomeini, the signing of Camp David agreement that eliminated Egypt from the front of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the need of the Syrian leadership from a new ally in addressing the Israeli risk were the factors that led to the approach and the strengthening of relations Damascus-Tehran¹⁵.

With the outbreak of war, Iraq-Iran (1980-1988) the regime of Hafez al-Assad clarified his pro-Iranian policy by backing the Islamic Republic of Iran against Arab Iraq. The suspension of the Iraqi pipeline Kirkuk-Banias in Mediterranean, caused great damage in Iraq during the war, proving whether it was meaningful and useful¹⁶ the support of the Syrian leader Assad to Iran.

The relations between the Iranian and Syrian regime were characterized by the specificity of different ideology, where the Syrian regime is secular, while Iran is Islamic. The two systems are joined by

¹⁵ The Hafez al-Assad and the Shah Riza Mouhament Bahlaoui signed an economic cooperation agreement in 1974 which was the basis for developing a strategic partnership, the arrival of the Islamists in Iran made the interstate relations more complex and stronger between Tehran and Damascus. Alarabiya.net, "Iran manages the Syrian crisis?" (07/23/11) (Date / Date of access: 24 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2011/07/23 / 158958.html>

¹⁶ Iraq was forced to construct new pipeline in Turkish territory to the Mediterranean to serve and not depend on Assad. Turkey's position was strengthened by the controversy between Arabs.

mutually shared interests and common opponents (US-Israel-Iraq Saddam Hussein era). Despite the large difference in economic opportunities between the two countries, both countries, as equal political partners, went to the strengthening of relations after the U.S. invasion of Baghdad in 2003.¹⁷

Iran is exempted from two traditional rivals with the collapse of military force in Iraq and the dismantling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and is given the opportunity to strengthen its geostrategic position in the Arab world in general and Syria in particular. The strong axis of cooperation between Tehran and Damascus extends outside the borders of the two countries coming to Lebanon and Palestine. The support of the organization of Hezbollah, which controls the current Lebanese government Meikati and consequently the whole Lebanon and the support of Hamas movement in Israel is some of the main areas of multidimensional Syrian-Iranian cooperation. Despite the complexity of interests and influences on the issue of Hezbollah in Lebanon the two countries reached the top of their strategic cooperation with the military success of Hezbollah against Israel in 2006.

The economic factor is equally important in bringing together the two regimes. Specifically, high technology, which was banned by Western countries to arrive in Syria, was covered by Iran, so the Syrian market is a pole of attraction for Iranian products¹⁸. Iran is an important energy source for Syria, since 2009 the two countries signed an agreement under which Damascus will import 3 billion Cm³ of gas from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Also, the Iranian government decided, recently, the pipeline transportation of natural gas to Syria through the Iraqi territory¹⁹.

The control of decision-making process in Syria from Alaouites Shiites started in 1970 and continues until today is identified with the political interests of Iran. The presence of the Syrian regime in power in Tehran brings political and sectarian gains. In recent years, the policy of shiitisation of the Syrian population composed of Sunni majority, demonstrates the excellent level of cooperation between the Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian regime of Assad.

The analysis of the alliance between Tehran and Damascus shows that is a flexible alliance of open interests ²⁰imposed due to international and regional treaties relating to the two states. Despite this there are political and strategic boundaries that bind to each side and give them the freedom and room for diplomatic openings to other competitive forces. This was demonstrated by the attitude of Syria in the crisis of Bahrain where the Syrian foreign policy was identified initially as that of the Arab Gulf countries²¹. Also, despite Syria's relations with Iran and Hezbollah and movement Hamas, Damascus via Turkey began negotiations with Israel on the Golan Heights knowing that this move would cause discomfort to the Iranians.

With the strategic partnership between the two countries Syria came to be Iran's gateway to the Arab world and Iran is an important bargaining leverage in the hands of Assad peace talks between Damascus and Tel Aviv.

¹⁷The two countries have proved serious players in the field supporting the Iraqi warring factions leading Washington to call one in Damascus and Tehran in search of a solution.

¹⁸ In Syria, a car factory began operation thanks to Iranian expertise

¹⁹ Ramin Mostafavi, «Iran to ink gas contact with Syria, Iraq», (24/07/11),(Date of access: 26 July 2011), Iranfocus, http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23513:iran-to-ink-gas-contact-with-syria-iraq&catid=7:iraq&Itemid=29

²⁰ Aljazeera.net, "Iran and Syria than enslaved or interests" (04/19/11) (Date of access: 19 April 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/44179230-7B04-4717-8B10-6C5846AD99F7.htm?GoogleStatID=20>

²¹ Mouhament Abbas Nadj, "Iran and the Syrian crisis," (05/03/11), (Date of access: 05 May 2011), Aljazeera.net, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/30AD0529-4BD2-436A-A693-400A27EE8DBD.htm?GoogleStatID=24>

2. The role of Iran in the Syrian crisis

Regarding the Arab spring, the official stance of the Iranian government is controversial. In the cases of Egypt, Libya and Bahrain Tehran supported the change in authoritarian regimes but in the case of the Syrian regime supports Assad against the majority of the Syrian people and even adopts the official Syrian view on foreign policy issues²². Despite this official position of Tehran there are political forces inside Iran who disagree with the policy of their country against the Syrian crisis, such as former Iranian President Hashim Rafsanjani characterizing the events in Syria insurgency of the people²³. Also reformists in Iran have expressed their support for the demands of the Syrian people and featured the Assad leader who leaves his country scorched earth and destroy the wealth of the people because of his thirst for power and also sought to stop the massacres of innocent civilians²⁴. The reformist cleric Ali Ayatollah Mouhament destgimp considered a sin to supply with money the Syrian regime by the Iranian government in order to suppress the demonstrators asking change and reform²⁵.

Excluding the military equipment aid received by the Assad regime before the start of the uprising²⁶, the presence of Iran inside Syria is strong from March 15 (the first day of the crisis). The controls implemented by the Turkish authorities because of the embargo imposed on Iran, showed that some Iranian cargo planes on their way to Syria were carrying military equipment and weapons²⁷.

It is true that from the first time of the Syrian revolt Iranian leadership support of the Assad regime with money²⁸, military equipment²⁹, oil and gives also the necessary training in the Syrian security forces on how to deal with insurgents. In tackling the crisis, both countries agreed on the creation of a military air base to facilitate the transfer of arms and military equipment from Tehran to the airport Latakia on the Mediterranean³⁰. U.S. officials argue that the select group of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard, which operates overseas known as the 'Strength Al Kouds³¹ "took action on

²² Alarabiya.net, Vice President of Iran characterizes the insurgency as Syrian foreign conspiracy of the major powers (07/25/11) (Date of access: 09 August 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/25/159314.html>

²³ Natzah Mouhament Ali, "Hashimi Rafsenjani: That is happening in Syria is resisting movement of people" (5/28/11) (Date of access: 28 May 2011), http://www.alarabiya.net/save_print.php?print=1&cont_id=150838

²⁴ Natzah Mouhament Ali, "Iran's Reformers: The Assad and Kadafi turned their countries into scorched earth because of the thirst for power" (07/08/11) (Date of access: 07 August 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/07/161217.html>

²⁵ Saud Al Zahedan, "Iranian Reform Headquarters prohibits religious support in Tehran for the Syrian regime to repress the people" (6/24/11), (Date of access: 24 June 2011), Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/06/24/154599.htm>

²⁶ Before extending the Arab spring in Syria, two Iranian warships crossed the Suez Canal for first time since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran by transferring military equipment to the Syrian regime, Al Quds Al Arabi-UK, «Two Iranian warships passed through the Suez Canal "(22/02/2011), <http://81.144.208.20:9090/pdf/2011/02/02-22/All.pdf>

²⁷ Alarabiya.net, «German newspaper confirms the commitment of Turkey to Iranian weapons on the road to Syria," (08/04/11) (Date of access: 05 August 2011),), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/04/160860.html>. The information was confirmed by the same Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

²⁸ Iranfocus, Tehran ready to give Syria \$5_8 billion__, (15/07/11), (Date of access: 16 July 2011), http://www.iranfocust.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23475:tehran-ready-to-give-syria-58-billion-report&catid=4:iran-general&Itemid=26 Also Iran has decided to supply the Syrian regime with 290 thousand barrels per day for the crisis.

²⁹ Alarabiya.net, «Can Iran to head the crisis in Syria?" (07/23/11), (Date of access: 24 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2011/07/23/158958.html>

³⁰ Al Quds Al Arabi, «Iran finances the creation of a military installation in Syria" (08/13/11), (Date of access: 14 August 2011), <http://alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=latest\data2011-08-13-07-46-07.htm>

³¹ Alarabiya.net, «Suleymani, hidden long arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Iraq and Syria" (02/08/11) (Date of access: 02 August 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/02/160562.html>. General Kasem Suleymani is the head of the Force Al Kouds and directly linked Agietolah haminaei

Syrian territory by assisting in the fight against demonstrators by providing technology and expertise to the Syrian forces³².

The isolation of Syria, during the crisis, from the friendly governments of France, Qatar and the new era of coldness between Ankara and Damascus pushes Alaouiti President al-Assad Bassar increasingly towards Tehran. The Iranian leadership, in turn, would not hesitate to exploit discontent among Ankara-Damascus to be a partner in making internal decisions within Syria to deal with Syrian insurgents³³ and increasing its influence maintaining the triangular-Syrian axis Iran-Hezbollah.

For the Iranians, the collapse of the Syrian regime means collapse of the Iranian strategy in the Middle East and Arab world, so that Tehran is closely monitoring developments in the Syrian revolt and make every effort to save Assad regime, which is the only Arab pro-Iranian regime in the Middle East, seeking by every means to draw stronger and stronger from the crisis.

The gradual change in Turkish attitudes toward Assad has upset the Iranian leadership fears the erosion of its influence. For this, the Iranians made clear to the Turks their position by saying that the fall of the Syrian regime is a red line for Iran. The warning to Turkey by the hardliner Iranian Revolutionary Guard for its stance towards the Syrian crisis demonstrates the concerns of Tehran for a possible change of the political map of the area where the fall of Assad³⁴. The statement by the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran was clear about the official policy of his country against the Syrian crisis: "if the choice is between Syria and Turkey, will no doubt go with Syria."³⁵

Because of the geopolitical importance of Syria, the country has become a playground dispute influence and competition between Ankara and Tehran, which reminds us of the struggle between the Ottomans and the status of al-Safavi (Shah Ismail al-Safavi) of Persia³⁶. The impact of the conflict between Iran and Turkey to Syria is delaying the process of democratic change and therefore the outcome of the insurgency. The conflict between Iran and Turkey affect the domestic situation in Syria where enhanced social and religious controversy between the Syrians Alaouites and Syrians Sunni. Iran opts for the scheme while Turkey chooses the people, but the gap between the people and leadership in Syria is enormous. This difference in attitude between Ankara-Tehran has negatively affected the course of the movement of Syrian rebels seeking political and democratic change.

In the field of demonstrations several Syrian demonstrators of the opposition claim that between the military forces of repression are Iranian and fighters from Hezbollah of Lebanon³⁷ and the Syrian leadership rejects the information from the opposition. Despite the refusal of Tehran through the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Akbar Salehi to support the Syrian regime financially and

³² Aljazeera.net, "Revelation Iranian role in Syria" (05/28/11) (Date of access: 31 May 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/1F5C2F75-4C6F-4F9E-8FD6-B00D653F4A99.htm?GoogleStatID=9>

³³ Alarabiya.net, "Syria and Iran's cooperation", (13/05/11), (Date of access: May 13, 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2011/05/13/148909.html>

³⁴ Saud Al Zahedan, "The Iranian Revolutionary Guard warns Turkey on its attitude from Damascus and reaffirms its support to Assad" (07/18/11), (Date of access: 18 July 2011), Alarabiya . net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/18/158186.html>

³⁵ Horsid Deli, "Where is Iran and Turkey from Syrian Crisis" (28/07/11) (Date of access: 30 July 2011), Aljazeera.net, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/970AB766-4AC6-4DEF-AFA3-5D7A6A975BF2.htm?GoogleStatID=1>

³⁶ Saleh Al Gkalab (the former Jordanian minister of press), "I do not rule controversy Ottoman and Safavi on Syria" (19/07/11) (Date of access: 19 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/19/158354.html>

³⁷ Saud Al Zahedan, "Insurgents city Hama arrest two Iranians who confessed their involvement in the suppression of demonstrators in Syria" (06/13/11), (Date of access: 14 June 2011), Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/06/13/153138.html>

militarily³⁸ the elements of UNHCR's, in its report, show the involvement of Iran and the Hezbollah in the murder of Syrian soldiers who refused to fire on demonstrators³⁹. Meanwhile the Hezbollah denies any involvement in Syrian affairs⁴⁰.

Many Arabs especially the Gulf argue that the Syrian crisis is the field of conflict between Arabs with Iranian expansionist policy in the region, and believe that if Tehran is able to keep the Assad regime after the crisis it would have achieved a strategic victory against the Arab Gulf countries⁴¹. This view is shared by the former Syrian vice-president in exile, Abdoulhalim Khaddam who noted that the Iranian arc will be extending from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean⁴². The failure of the release of Syria from Iran's plans, the traditional enemy of the Arab Gulf countries, forcing these countries due to concern, to break their silence on the Syrian crisis, through the King of Saudi Arabia Abdullah, "the Syrian leadership if it does not stop the mechanism of repression it will have reached the point of anarchy and decay"⁴³. The reactionary statements of one commentator of the Syrian regime on the support of Shiite opposition members in the Arabian peninsula confirmed the concerns of the Arab Gulf countries.

For the first time after five months of crisis the pressures on the Syrian regime for the peaceful settlement of the crisis is increasing. The UN Security Council condemns the repressive actions of the Syrian regime after the radical change in Russian attitudes. Actions followed the Arab Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain) to the withdrawal of ambassadors from Syria. Nevertheless, and despite Turkish warnings of military intervention, the Syrian leadership not only insists on the military solution, but threatened with its ability to incite the Shiites in the Gulf which would lead to dire consequences if they performed the threat⁴⁴.

The case of the resignation of Iran by the Syrian crisis is limited but not excluded; the consideration would be to surrender the whole of Iraq by the Americans, to the Iranian influence. The realization of this exchange needs the consent of the Turks, the other Arabs, the U.S. and international community which make the most difficult. The increased pressure from the Arabs and the international community for the Syrian regime can make Tehran to reconsider its stance on the military solution followed by Assad in dealing with rebels of the Syrian people⁴⁵.

Iran seeks the help of the Syrian regime to play the role of protector of Shiite Muslims in the Middle East as a vehicle for implementing the national "expansion" of the policy. For Tehran, the Syrian crisis is only the Iranian case. For the Syrian regime of Assad, the approach to Iran is the only way to stay in power because of the pressures of Syrian demonstrators, Turkish attitudes and sanctions of the international community. The Syrian Assad regime is the lung of Iran and the heart Hezbollah in the

³⁸ CNN, «Saleh denies that Iran supports Syria with Men and Arms" (08/07/11), (Date of access: 07 August 2011), <http://arabic.cnn.com/2011/syria.2011/8/6/salehi.syria/index.html>

³⁹ Mousa al-Sharif, "the UNHCR: Iran and its mixed Hezbollah significant killing Syrian soldiers" (05/08/11), (Date of access: 05 August 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/05/160985.html>

⁴⁰ CNN, "About 3000 missing and Hezbollah denies involvement in suppression" (29/07/11), (Date of access: 07 August 2011), <http://arabic.cnn.com/2011/syria.2011/7/29/syria.hezbollah/index.html>

⁴¹ Saleh Al-Said, "If Iran obtained the eve of Assad, it would be a strategic victory in the Gulf" (07/17/11) (Date of access: 18 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/17/158072.html>

⁴² Alarabiya.net, «Khaddam: The failure of the Syrian revolt will determine the sovereignty of Iran in the region", (07/20/11), (Date of access: 20 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/20/158496.html>

⁴³ Walid Skeir, "What about Iran," (8/12/11) (Date of access: 12 August 2011), Daralhayat, <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/296844>

⁴⁴ Abdul Bari Attouan, "Syria and the instigation of the Shi'ites in the Gulf" (07-08/08/11) (Date of access: 08 August 2011), Al Quds Al Arabi, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=data\2011\08\08-07\07z999.htm>

⁴⁵ Alarabiya.net, «The Iranian ambassador to Moscow, Damascus has rejected Iran's proposal to solve the Syrian crisis" (8/25/11) (Date of access: 25 August 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/25/164054.html>

Middle East on this fall will be a final blow to the Iranian “Shiite” crescent that causes "fear" in Sunni countries⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Al Quds Al Arabi, «The fall of the Syrian regime will be the coup de boule for the Shiite crescent" (09/08/11) (Date of access: 10 August 2011), <http://alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=latest\data\2011-08-09-07-32-01.htm>

THE ROLE OF TURKEY IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND THE CHALLENGES IT FACES

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http://www.cemmis.edu.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=269%3Athe-role-of-turkey-in-the-syrian-crisis-and-the-challenges-it-faces&catid=77&Itemid=94&lang=el

The presence of the USA in Iraq, the threats by former US defense minister Donald Rumsfeld in 2003 against Syria, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party coming to power in Turkey, the isolation of the Syrian regime due to the cold relations with Lebanon's and Jordan's governments and the economic cooperation with Syria were the main causes of strengthening the relations between Turkey and Syria during the period 2003-2010/47. However, the spread of the Arab Spring in Syria cast a shadow over the good relations between Ankara and Damascus. As a result, reservation and suspicion obscured the communication between the two states.

Turkey's initial reaction to the outbreak of the Syrian crisis was instinctive in avoiding any form of conflict according to the Erdogan government's 'zero problems' policy. However, the large potential wave of refugees, the demonstrations spreading in many regions all over Syria with which Turkey has the largest borderline, the fear that members of Al Qaeda and PKK will enter the country along with the refugees as well as the economic factor (the large Turkish investments in Syria) became reasons which made the Turkish government increasingly interested in the crisis.

Yet another quandary ferments between the two states following Syria's decision to use military means in tackling the uprising, and since Turkey stated its interest to participate in implementing any measures adopted by the United Nations against Damascus (should the situation get worse). From the side of the Syrian officials there is not only hesitation but an anticipation almost reaching the degree of concern about the "disturbing" Turkish attitude. This became more apparent after the welcoming of the Secretary General of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Riad al-Shaqfa in Istanbul, who invited the demonstrators to protest against the Syrian regime 48.

The officials of the Justice and Development Party view the regime's dealing with the protesters as wrong and their way of managing the crisis incorrect. Moreover, Turkey is officially unsatisfied with the slow-paced reformation that the Syrian government tries to implement and is sending underground messages, which implicitly threaten that they won't allow a second Hama⁴⁹. Meanwhile,

⁴⁷ In the last 3 years Turkish-Syrian relations have evolved greatly, local travelers no longer need a visa to move between the two countries, dozens of agreements of economic cooperation have been signed, tourism has developed significantly and the two countries have established a Strategic Cooperation Council.

⁴⁸ Khorsid Deli, "Turkey and the Syrian Crisis" (05/18/11) (Date of access: 19 May 2011), Aljazeera.net, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4D8A790E-B158-4EA8-B639-481964203DAF.htm?GoogleStatID=1>

⁴⁹ Aljazeera.net, «Erdogan's warning for potential massacres in Syria," (5/11/11), (Date of access: 11 May 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/7C3BCCF9-A3CC-4FE8-BEDC-6E2ED767A45D.html> He is referring to the

the Assad regime views the Turkish obsession for quick and serious reformation as annoying and domineering.

The Turkish government believes that its experience in successful reformation can be used as an example for democratic change in other countries of the region, especially Syria, because of the economic, social, cultural, geographical and historical relations between the two countries. This is why the Turks show more interest in the Syrian crisis compared to the cases of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. Turkey wouldn't wish for democratic changes to affect the political stability in Syria and doesn't seek the fall of the Assad regime. Stability in Syria is a sensitive matter for Turkey, especially concerning its national security, since they share borders and since there are 2 million Kurds in Syria; the fear of them uniting with the ones in Turkey and Iraq with the intention to form a Kurdish state is reason enough for sensitivity.

Davutoglu's foreign policy has supported the Arab Spring, having adopted a noticeable position towards the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Therefore Turkey should not treat the Syrian crisis differently. This is perhaps why Turkish officials keep a direct and continuous communication with the Syrian leadership and have suggested to President Assad to allow Turkey to train Syrian officials on institutional crisis management based on their own experience. They have also presented to the Syrian authorities a new roadmap of the reforms which, in Turkish eyes, is needed in order to defuse the crisis⁵⁰. In the mean time, the Turkish press compares the Syrian crisis to the one in Libya and expresses its concern about the military action taken by Assad and its consequences on the future of Syria.

The Turkish government, in an effort to help deal with the crisis, allowed exiled members of the Syrian opposition⁵¹ to meet on Turkish ground on more than one occasions, and permitted the presence of the 'Society of the Muslim Brothers' which has unresolved issues with the Syrian regime since the destruction of the city of Hama in 1982⁵². The main problem is Damascus's refusal to negotiate with the Muslim Brotherhood, against Ankara's requests, since Assad's Syria draws the line in this matter the same way Turkey does with the PKK.

With tensions having escalated in Syria, where more and more protests have appeared all over the country with rising numbers of outraged participants⁵³, the priorities of the two governments have begun taking different directions. Assad focuses on the safety of the regime without taking into account the huge cost in victims' lives, while Ankara insists that political change, democracy, stability and security cannot flourish from the use of military action. What Syria officially argues is that there is a conspiracy against the state and that armed groups are behind the riots. Turkey, based on its own intelligence, disagrees with the above statement. The Alawite president Assad claims he is being targeted due to his ethnic and religious background, since the majority of Syrian Muslims are Sunnis. The Turkish government disagrees, saying that the main cause of the crisis is not the controversy between Sunnis and Alawites, but the population's calls for reformation and democracy.

Ankara called the reforms which Assad implemented (lifting the State of Emergency and abolishing the Supreme State Security Court) insufficient in bringing about a more democratic

massacre that came as a result after the Syrian regime and the "Muslim Brotherhood" colluded leaving thousands of dead and the city in ruins.

⁵⁰ Daniel Abd Al fatah, "Turkish mission headed to Syria to help start the process of comprehensive reforms" (04/28/11) (Date of access: 30 April 2011), Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/04/28/147080.html>.

⁵¹ BBC, «The Syrian opposition meets in Turkey and Assad Committee recommends national dialogue in Damascus" (01/06/11), (Date of access: 01 June 2011), http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/worldnews/2011/06/110601_syria_assad_committee_dialogue.shtml

⁵² The province of Hama is the center of Sunnism in Syria. Most traditional families that ruled Syria came from that area before Assad's coup in 1970. In 1982 Assad destroyed the city because of a revolution. 30.000 were killed and thousands have been missing since then.

⁵³ Eyewitnesses said that in the Hamas county demonstrators exceeded 500.000 demanding the fall of the regime.

system and asked the Syrian leaders to stop the excessive use of military violence against the protesters. This has disappointed the Syrian government, especially since the two sides have managed to achieve cooperation in matters such as the PKK issue. They never expected the wind of change to blow from their Turkish ally who refused to adopt Syria's official position⁵⁴.

Turkey seems to follow a stance of continuous and intense pressure on president Assad for substantial changes. This pressure increases with the possibility of the Syrian regime collapsing which would lead to the ensuing of anarchy, international intervention, various problems concerning the Kurdish matter and possible refugee problems. In order for the both countries to avoid reaching a dead end in case matters escalate, the Turkish government is trying to take advantage of its warm, friendly and personal relations with Bashar al-Assad himself to resolve Syria's domestic issues by satisfying the people's demands. Ankara is making efforts to retain its communication with the Assad regime, while simultaneously trying to convince the Syrian leader that the Turkish proposal is the only way to emerge out of the crisis. Furthermore, Turkey stresses its neutrality but shows support to the Syrian people⁵⁵ and, should the current state of things change, it would be best if change came from the inside rather than the outside. This indicates that Turkey is not afraid of a possible political power shift if the crisis deepens. As conditions now indicate, Erdogan's government will keep pressuring Assad as long as the Syrian people continue their uprising and the Turkish (and greater Arab) public opinion stands by the Syrian population.

There is the possibility that Assad will suppress the rebellion through violent force supported by Iran in order to impose his domination both inside and outside of the country. This would put Turkey in a difficult position, and if Assad doesn't follow Turkey's proposals and put an end to the demonstrations he will expose himself to intense pressure both from the inside and the outside. In that case, Turkey will have no choice but to adjust its position according to that pressure.

In 2004, Syria and Turkey signed a Free Trade Agreement that came in affect in 2007. Based on the agreement, Ankara ceased to impose customs' duties on Syrian products, and Syria began to reduce its tariff on Turkish goods (and will continue to do so for the next 12 years). However, the Turkish products have managed to conquer the Syrian market and in the first few years brought a 15% loss in the Syrian industry. To compensate for that loss Turkish businesses have built factories in the city of Aleppo which is located 26 km away from the Turkish border. Therefore, considering Turkey's 'soft power' attitude and Syria's economic crisis, Ankara (with the support of the UN and other international organizations) can limit or suspend trade as a means to pressurize Assad to cease the military violence against protesters. What concerns Turkey, however, is that Syria might respond with trade sanctions on Turkish products which - combined with the current international sanctions that are in effect- could lead to the disappearance of Turkish products in the Syrian market. Moreover, a shutdown of the factories financed by Turkish investors would raise the unemployment rate and cause problems amongst the working class as well⁵⁶. Thus, deterioration in Turkish-Syrian trade relations would force the middle and wealthier social strata of Syrians to reconsider their positive attitude towards the current regime.

Another important factor which could affect the Turkish policy towards Assad is the 20 million Alawites in Turkey⁵⁷ who support the Syrian president. The Turkish government took this fact into

⁵⁴ Ali Hasan Bakir, "Turkey's position over the crisis in Syria," Arab Centre of Civil Research and Study, Aljazeera.net, (04/07/11), (Date / Date of access: 4 July 2011). <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/847AEC70-5386-441E-9BC4-817136ABA341.htm?GoogleStatID=9>

⁵⁵ Aljazeera.net, «Erdogan asks Assad to meet the demands of his people" (5/13/11) (Date / Date of access: 26 July 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/54F1285A-4968-409B-9411-57E98BADFE6C.htm>

⁵⁶ Soner Cagaptay and Andrew J. Tabler, «How Washington Can Work with Turkey on Syria», The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, (14/07/11), (Ημ/νία πρόσβασης: 30 Ιουλίου 2011), <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3385>

⁵⁷ Mohyeddin Sajedi, «Turkey's failure in Syrian crisis», (26/07/11), (Ημ/νία πρόσβασης: 26 Ιουλίου 2011), Islam times, <http://islamtimes.org/vdcev8v.jh8ffik1bj.tx>

account during June's national elections while the current uprising was unfolding in Syria, and checked whether the dispute between the regime and the protesters could turn into a fight between Sunnis and Alawites.

The controversy between Turkey and Iran over Syria

Iran's official attitude towards the Arab Spring has been contradictory to that of Turkey's. In cases of other Arab revolts, Tehran has supported regime changes, as was shown by the examples of Egypt, Libya and Bahrain. However, it now voices its support to the Assad regime and endorses the official Syrian statement, that everything is a foreign conspiracy.

Like Turkey, Tehran has also been following Syria closely since the first days of the uprising, but on a different footing; it has offered its assistance to the current government. With the crisis escalating, Syria has become a playground of influence and competition between Iran and Turkey, bringing back memories of the dispute between the Ottomans and Ismail I (Shah Ismail Safavi) of Persia⁵⁸.

The Iranian government supports Assad because he leads the only Arab, pro-Iranian regime in the Middle East with the economic means⁵⁹, the military equipment⁶⁰, the oil and the training to deal with the demonstrations. Turkey's gradual change of attitude towards Assad has upset Iran which has clarified its position to Turkey saying that the fall of the Syrian regime will be the 'red line' for Iran⁶¹. The statement by the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was clear regarding his country's official position on the Syrian crisis: "If we had to choose between Syria and Turkey we would undoubtedly choose Syria"⁶². The collapse of the Syrian regime would signal the end of Iran's strategy in the Middle East and the Arab world, so Tehran watches closely over the developments, monitors every detail and uses every means to save the current regime so that it can emerge more powerful.

Conclusion

When it comes to the Syrian crisis, Turkey follows a double-headed strategy. On the one hand it hosts meetings of the Syrian opposition (the Muslim Brotherhood in particular) and on the other hand insists that the current government should reform. In the Turkish government's eyes (who like to see security, stability and good economic relations are in place) the immediate national benefits would require Syria to undergo political and economic reformation, as it wishes for the whole of the Arab region. The Turkish government, by adopting a diplomatic stance, seeks to play the role of the intermediary between the regime and the opposition without leaving out the possibility of the regime's collapse in the event it fails to implement effective changes.

⁵⁸ Saleh Qallab (Former Jordanian Minister of Information), "I don't rule out a conflict between Ottomans and Safavi in Syria" (19/07/11) (Date of access: 19 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/19/158354.html>

⁵⁹ Iranfocus, Tehran ready to give Syria \$5.8 billion, (15/07/11), (Date of access: 16 July 2011), http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23475:tehran-ready-to-give-syria-58-billion-report&catid=4:iran-general&Itemid=26 Iran has also decided to supply the Syrian regime with 290 thousand barrels of oil per day to help deal with the crisis.

⁶⁰ Alarabiya.net, «Can Iran manage the crisis in Syria?» (07/23/11) (Date of access: 24 July 2011), <http://www.alarabiya.net/views/2011/07/23/158958.html>

⁶¹ Saud Al Zahed, "The Iranian Revolutionary Guard warns Turkey for its attitude towards Damascus and reaffirms its support to Assad", (07/18/11) (Date of access: 18 July 2011), Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/18/158186.html>

⁶² Khorshid Dali, "Where is Iran and Turkey in the Syrian Crisis" (28/07/11) (Date of access: 30 July 2011), Aljazeera.net, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/970AB766-4AC6-4DEF-AFA3-5D7A6A975BF2.htm?GoogleStatID=1>

Turkish policy collides with the way Syria has managed the crisis so far because of the slow-paced and superficial reforms it has implemented, coupled with the use of military force. This collision could gradually lead to the deterioration of the bilateral relations and form a breach between the two countries in the near future.

The establishment of a safety zone inside Syria, after 12,000 Syrians have already sought refuge on Turkish ground, would reinforce Turkey's international status⁶³ and this could prove a good idea should the Syrian crisis evolve into a civil war. By using the safety zone, Turkey will avoid using military solutions and will be able to maintain its diplomatic status in the Middle East, as well as continuing to provide significant assistance to the Syrian refugees.

The dispute between Iran and Turkey will probably delay the process for democratic change and therefore the outcome of the uprising. Assad's regime is the lungs of Iran and the heart of Hezbollah, so to speak, and its fall would weaken Hezbollah in Lebanon and end Iran's influence over the Middle East. Turkey might be open to a Syrian, Sunni government that would follow the current political Turkish model and which would deal with the Iranian 'invasion' in the region. A new Cold Age between Ankara and Damascus would push Assad in Iran's arms and Tehran will not hesitate to take advantage of the discontent between Ankara and Damascus in order to become a partner in the Syrian decision-making process in dealing with the rebels.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Turkish-Iranian relations will be affected by the Syrian crisis because of their mutual interests: their trade that has an estimated worth of \$10 billion, the Kurdish issue, and the nuclear program. As a result, each country tries to protect its affairs without ceasing its interest in the developments in Syria. Deterioration in Turkish-Iranian relations may occur if the international community decides to implement severe measures and impose more sanctions on the Assad regime. In that case, Turkey would have to side with the West while Iran would try to exploit its influence over the Iraqi government and exert economic pressure on Ankara.

Iran and Turkey's dispute has also affected the situation in Syria, especially since it reinforced the socio-religious conflict between the Sunnis and Alawites. Iran sided with the regime while Turkey took the side of the people, but the gap between the people and their leaders is enormous; moreover, the differences between Ankara and Tehran have had a negative effect on the Syrian liberation movements which seek political change.

The escalating crisis shows that the Syrian regime is becoming more isolated, especially since France and Qatar suspended their diplomatic missions in the country after having been attacked by Assad's supporters⁶⁴. It is difficult for the Syrian president to proclaim free elections when such a decision would mark the end of his dynasty, since the majority is against him (especially after the harsh crackdown on protesters).

It seems the future of the Syrian regime lies in the hands of foreign intervention, such as Turkey's and Iran's, and it could turn the Syrian matter from a national to a regional crisis because of the continuous interventions and different attitudes the two competing regional forces demonstrate. This is why it is imperative for the countries of the Arab league to take a stand so that the Syrian crisis remains under Arab control.

⁶³ Nour al Din Al Farithi, "Europeans call for a safe passage between Syria and Turkey to help with the refugees" (07/07/11), (Date of access: 07 July 2011), Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/07/07/156463.html>

⁶⁴ Aljazeera.net, «Qatar suspends its embassy's operations in Syria" (19/07/11) (Date of access: 19 July 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4376F663-40E0-4A88-89CC-A1F26D15698A.html>

THE GRAND BRITISH INITIATIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST (The case of Syria)

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Extracts

1. The geo-political framework in the Middle East

The Grand British Initiative in the Middle East (GBIM) was masterminded by Mr Blaire, former Prime Minister of Britain and it was initiated at the end of 2006.

This initiative was planned in the wider context of geopolitical designs of Britain in the region which focus on two issues of primal strategic importance:

1. The geo-political ‘protection’ of its bases in Cyprus^{*30}
2. The search for new energy sources in the region (in the light of the North Sea oil depletion) and the geopolitical ensurement of them with emphasis in the oil reserves in the Gulfs of Mersina and Antalya^{*31}

Note that in November 2011 Turkey has reached agreement with oil giant Shell, for the exploration in the Gulf of Antalya^{*29}.

Turkey also plans to announce a tender for hydrocarbon exploration in the Gulf of Mersin and Iskenderun, and many major oil companies such as Statoil, Petrobras, Chevron, and Exxon are believed to be interested^{*29}.

In this way, the wider area including Cyprus, the “sea energy arrow” north of it and the neighboring regions of Turkey (Mediterranean region) and Syria (Latakia and Tartus regions) become a **military, security and energy complex** of high geo-strategic importance for Britain. Notice that Alawites present the ‘interconnecting’ power of all the above regions, a fact that weighs heavily on the foreign policies of Britain (and not only) with respect to Syria, Cyprus and Turkey.

GBMI is heavily focusing on Turkey, Syria and Iran trying to introduce geo-political and geo-economic ‘bonds’ and roles among these countries and a new geopolitical thinking of a ‘soft’ approach towards the security problems of the region. Although this ‘triangular’ British initiative seems to negatively interact (in many aspects) with Israeli interests and designs in the region, it has received, on the other hand, a rather positive interest on the part of Obama administration policy makers. The prospect of incorporating Israel in this initiative seems to be an ambitious (but highly risky and un-probable) aim hidden in the back of British geopolitical analysts mind.

One factor which appears to act as a ‘common geopolitical denominator’ in the minds of policy makers in Washington, London and Jerusalem, is the ‘reforming’ character of Alawite Assad regime which seems to be more ‘trust-worthy’ than the straightforward Arab Muslims of Syrian anti-government resistance groups (most of them characterized by pan-arabic ideological inclinations), under the condition, of course, that Assad’s political, military and economic ties with Iran are drastically weakened.

Indicative of the significance of ‘Alewives’ factor in the British, American and Israeli designs in the region are the following facts:

1. In 28 March 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that it was unlikely the US would intervene in Syria, since the US Congress views al-Assad as "a reformer"^{*32}
2. On January 10th 2012 Benny Gantz, the Israeli military chief of staff, informed members of the Knesset committee that in the event of the Syrian regime's collapse Israel is getting ready to permit fleeing Syrian Alawites settlement in the Golan Heights^{*33}.

If appropriately exploited, the above factor may save the GBIM which seems to have entered recently a collapsing course.

This thoroughly designed initiative seems to be in accordance with relevant Turkish initiatives in the area to such a degree that one could not exclude the possibility of a fine tuning between them.

The Turkish initiative regards the improvement of Turco-Syrian economic and military ties and the Turkish mediation in the Israeli-Syrian talks on occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

2. The Syrian chapter of GBIM

British Premier sent at the end of 2006 a secret envoy in Damascus, Sir Nigel Sheinwald. Premier's spokesman commented on this highly controversial visit: "We all know that Syria is part of the reality on the ground in the Middle East and therefore it can play either a constructive or destructive role" and he added "we obviously would hope that it will play a constructive role. But in the end, the Syrian government will decide what it believes is in Syria's best interests"^{*1}.

There is uncertainty on whether this British initiative (at least its initial phase) was the result of Anglo-American consultation or it was a genuine British effort (planned independently from Americans) aiming to prepare (or 'force') the path for analogous American interventions in the region. In any case this initiative was received with skepticism by Israeli, American and European commentators. Simon Tisdall, from Guardian newspaper, characteristically commented on this issue (1 November 2006): "(Mr Blair is) playing second fiddle in Syria" adding that "Only one year ago the conventional wisdom in Washington and European Capitals was that the Syrian president was on the skids. Now it seems he is calling the shots"^{*2}. After some very critical comments about the wrong doings of Assad (father and son) regime Tisdall continues: "So when Sir Nigel unexpectedly tuned up on the doorstep on Monday, the UK envoy was hardly in a position to set the agenda, let alone let alone dictate terms. Britain, in its now familiar capacity of sleeves-rolled up proxy for a more fastidious Washington, had little option but to listen politely and make nice as Downing Street's highly respectful tone today indicates". At the same time fears were expressed by commentators around the world that Washington hardliners will oppose a Syrian rapprochement and that the Dick Cheney wing of the Republican party and assorted neo-conservatives would portray it as a betrayal of the Bush "freedom doctrine" of promoting democracy in the Middle East.

Two years later British plan attained full speed on the ground with the controversial visit of David Miliband, the British foreign secretary, to Damascus on 18 November 2008, who stressed the fact that "Syria is a very important country with important responsibilities" adding that "Syria has the opportunity to play a constructive role in the search for Middle East peace"^{*3}. Note that Miliband's visit to Damascus was the first by a British Cabinet minister since September 11 terrorist attack in 2001. In the context of a "carrot and stick" approach to regional issues, the British envoy, exercising the "carrot" part of it in order to please his audience in Damascus he concluded: "The British position for a fair and proper implementation of the agreements. That means preferential trade for Israeli and

Palestinian products, but not preferential trade from the settlements. All settlements in the occupied territories are illegal under international law". Israelis reacted with skepticism saying that "campaign against settlement products is not helpful"*⁴.

On the other hand, the fact this visit took place at a time in which the US president- elect Barack Obama had not yet fully disclosed his Middle East agenda is a strong indication for the assumption that the British plans (probably in tune with certain segments of the foreign affairs establishment in Washington) were not discussed within the new administration think tanks. Hence they constituted, most probably, a pre-emptive effort to influence Obama's agenda at the sensitive stage between its setting up and its implementation where fine tuning adjustments are taking place. After all, the following Miliband's comments were indicative of the British intentions: "The election of a new administration in the U.S. does represent a new opportunity for emgagement by the U.S. in the Middle East region"*⁴. Following Miliband's visit to Damascus the full width and depth of British designs in the area is starting to unfold quickly.

In 19 November 2008 the British foreign secretary confirmed that Britain and Syria have struck a deal to cooperate on counter-terrorism issues*⁶. Speaking on this issue at the American University of Beirut, Miliband said Britain "will cooperate on counter-terrorism issues with the Syrian authorities", highlighting what he said was the decrease in the number of foreign fighters crossing from Syria into Iraq over the past 12 months. He added that "The window of opportunity for consensus in the Middle East is quite narrow and getting smaller by the month."*⁶ A prominent Syrian historian and analyst, Sami Moubayed, commented on this issue: "Syria has plenty to gain in breaking down the final stages of the Bush administration isolation" adding that "Britain has realised that solving anything in the Middle East is not possible without Syria. Many see this as falling into line with what Obama is going to be doing, and that the British took the initiative so Obama can get a head start when he comes to power."*⁶

On the other hand the fact that the Syrian regime jailed a dozen pro-democracy intellectuals and activists only a few weeks ago seems to be of secondary importance to the British plans.

In 24 July 2009 the Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Muallem visited London in the context of more or less regular (annual) high level diplomatic meetings between London and Damascus. Note that the regularity of these meetings (in the period 2006-2011) reveals the depth and the methodic planning of GBIM. The British foreign secretary, David Miliband, welcomed the warming of the bilateral relations between Syria and Britain stressing that "The really excellent discussions that we've had today I think are testimony to the growing depth and breadth to the relationship between the UK and Syria". Summarizing, the British foreign minister told reporters after the meeting with Walid al-Muallem "We've reviewed bilateral relations which I think are deepening on the economic and cultural front as well as on the political and diplomatic front. We spent most of our time talking about the range of issues that are contemporary, current, important regarding the future of the Middle East, a region of the world that is vitally important to the UK and a region of the world in which Syria plays a pivotal role"*²⁵.

During this meeting British foreign minister disclosed another important dimension of GBIM, namely the energy factor, by saying: "I was particularly interested that he should have highlighted the importance of the Nabucco (pipeline)which is a key energy security issue for Europe and an issue that Europe is giving renewed attention to at the moment.". It seems that this pipeline served very well the British geopolitical plans in the region by enhancing the position of Turkey, creating an important energy bond between the partners of GBIM and weakening the position of Greece and Russia in the map of energy geopolitics.

At the end of January 2011 London sent British foreign secretary William Hague to Damascus to review ongoing cooperation between the two countries. The British ambassador in Damascus Simon

Collis, in an interview with Dalia Haidar, commented on this visit: “Foreign Secretary William Hague's visit to Damascus at the end of January gave both governments an opportunity to discuss the political aspects of relations and explore what more can be done. There were good discussions with both Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu'alleem. We will be looking to take that forward for the rest of 2011 and beyond, with a focus on higher education and cultural cooperation”.*^{4a}

In 27 April 2011 newspaper Guardian disclosed that several Syrian officers received training in the Ministry of Defense colleges following Miliband's visit to Damascus*⁸. Reacting to the international outrage over the above British policies a Defense Department spokeswoman made some highly controversial and vague comments such as “no training would be given if it would led to human rights abuses”.*⁸.

At the same time the British worked innovatively to promote a positive international image for the Syrian regime. Lord Bell, the chairman of Chime, the London public relations company (that includes also Bell Pottinger), disclosed in mid April 2011 that he acted for Syria's first lady, Asma al-Assad, in 2007 and 2008 at the beginning of a public relations drive to place her at the forefront of Syria's international image*¹⁰.

Even after March 2011, when international outrage against Syria's regime had been fully erupted and U.S. had started to impose sanctions against Damascus, there were numerous British interest companies that were allowed to deal with Assad's regime. For example, Gulfsands Petroleum, a London-traded energy firm (with Andrew West, a British subject, on its head) despite international reactions revealed in 26 August 2011 that it intended to continue drilling for oil in Syria, not addressing a proposed EU embargo on Syria's petroleum*¹¹.

Furthermore, as Guardian disclosed in September 2011, Shell, the most valuable firm listed in the London Stock Exchange, is directly connected to the economic interests of Assad's government, having a 21% share in the Al Furat Petroleum Company 50% of which is owned by the Syrian State*¹². Guardian journalist George Monbiot commented on this issue in 19 September 2011: “But, though (Shell) complying with current sanctions, it is enriching a government that is violently repressing peaceful protests.”*¹²

The well-organized and fast expanding Syrian uprising, most probably, took British by surprise. The handling of this uprising by Assad's regime and the resulting international reactions (that were intensified since August 2011 with the imposition of sanctions by U.S. and E.U.) stroke a lethal blow to the Grand British Initiative. In a desperate attempt to address the problem at its heart (that is the sanctions against Syria) and save the initiative the British artfully initiated a controversial discussion in the British public aiming to substitute the profound one-dimensional logic of the punitive measures of sanctions with a ‘cost-benefit’ analysis logic. Indicative of the above efforts are the titles of large circulation newspapers such as “What do you think – should we impose sanctions against Syria?” (Guardian, 16 September 2011)*¹⁴ and “Damned if we do impose sanctions on Syria. And damned if we don't”. (Guardian, 19 September 2011)*¹⁵. The ‘cost-benefit’ logic was aiming to produce public reactions against the punitive measures which would put in doubt relevant policies and offer British diplomacy the opportunity to argue (as a result of public pressures) against them with Americans and Europeans

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4. International reactions against the Syrian regime and the British stance

Regarding the hot issue of international reactions against the Syrian regime, one may notice that the first and most punitive reactions came from U.S. with President Obama imposing, in 18 May 2011, sanctions on Syrian President and six other senior Syrian officials^{*18} and continuing, in August 2011, with a new round of more severe economic sanctions on Syrian telecom companies and banks^{*19}. In 28 March 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that it was unlikely the US would intervene in Syria, since the US Congress views al-Assad as "a reformer".^{*27}

On 15 August, appearing on US late-night talk show *The Colbert Report*, US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice said that testimonials from Syrian protesters as reported by Ford were shaping Washington's policies on Syria. "What [Ford] hears every day and what [the protesters] want from the United States is more leadership, political pressure, and sanctions, but very clearly no military intervention," she said.^{*28}

As it is evident from the above, despite its fierce political reactions and the punitive economic measures against the Syrian regime the U.S. administration is not aiming (for the time being) to a military intervention in Syria or change of its regime. Most probably U.S. administrations aims to keep Assad's regime in power under the condition that it will stop crossing the red American lines regarding Iran, Hamas and probably Russia.

The Germans followed Americans, as far as severity of punitive measures are concerned, with the chairman of German government committee of foreign relations declaring, in early August 2011, that Berlin wanted stronger sanctions against Syria^{*20}.

Britain, as expected and in order to save its initiative, was more cautious with William Hague, the British foreign secretary, calling on Syria, in a rather soft message, to respect their people's right to peaceful protests and to take action about their legitimate grievances^{*21}.

Following the strong reactions of Washington and Berlin London was forced to rise the tones of condemnation with Tony Blair, former British Premier and the architect of G.B.I., declaring in June 2011: "Change in Syria is essential" although he warned of a power vacuum in the country in the case that President Assad's regime collapse. He added: "It is important we get to the point where the Syrian people are able to elect their government". He also said he hoped Assad would make the necessary reforms, but acknowledged that the majority opinion among protesters in Syria was likely that the president must leave power for the democratic transition to go forward^{*22}.

5. The Turkish chapter of GBIM (and its relation with Syria)

The Turkish initiative regarding the improvement of Turco-Syrian economic and military ties and the Turkish mediation in the Israeli-Syrian talks on occupied Syrian Golan Heights was, almost certainly, in fine tune with the GBIM with the possibility of being at some stage 'incorporated' into the British initiative being not at all negligible.

The possibility of a power vacuum in Syria seems to be a hot issue both for the British and their close allies and partners in the GBIM, the Turks.

Actually, in early Spring (when Ankara was still hoping to a quick end to the Syrian uprising that will leave its ally in Damascus and the anti-Kurdish Turco-Syrian military relations unharmed) foreign minister Davutoglu, in 21 March 2011, issued a very soft statement not at all condemning Syrian

regime: “Syria is an important threshold. We hope problems between the people and the administration can be handled without troubles”.^{*23} After the stiffening of international reactions Turks (as their British allies) were forced to issue condemnation statements.

In early July 2011, at a moment Assad’s regime was appearing to be at the edge of collapse, the main regional partners of GBIM seemed to unite somehow their efforts in order to save Assad. Actually, in 12 July 2011, the Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi hailed Turkish-Syrian-Iranian relations, saying the three nations are “members of a family”^{*24}. Saleh met with his Turkish counterpart Davutoglu to discuss the so called ‘Arab Spring’ including recent developments in Syria. A month later, when the situation in Syria was worsening and the international reactions were further intensifying, Ankara and London started to seriously worry about the prospects of a power vacuum in Damascus (on which Blaire artfully commented) and most probably after coordination with the latter Ankara made a U-turn in its approach towards Syria aiming to retain a control over developments in Syria and extent its influence on both the political and the military wing of the anti-Assad forces.

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THE SYRIAN CRISIS AS THE PRELUDE OF A NEW ORDER IN THE REGION.

Reshaping the power balance equilibrium in Europe and re-designing frontiers in the Middle East

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Extracts

The issue of frontiers re-design in the Middle East

The issue of frontiers re-design in the Middle East and the establishment of a new order in it has drawn the interest of hundreds of researchers and authors. Among their findings, the various maps of Great Kurdistan (especially that of Ralph Peters^{*2}) carry within them a (mainly propagandistic) symbolism and a significance going beyond research activities, even routine ones, and most probably masks hidden geopolitical pursuits. Note that the Turkish government protested angrily to the U.S. government for Ralph Peters' map but Washington replied that relevant article accommodates the findings of routine research with no political angles. On the other hand, the prospect of a Great Kurdistan cannot be the outcome of a "parthenogenesis" but the result of geo-strategic commitments by the part of the global players in the Region (mainly of U.S.).

This study combines widely accepted facts (regarding the geopolitical pursuits of global powers and their interests in the Region) with a series of hypothesis regarding possible hidden pursuits and military intervention scenarios. The intervention and frontier re-design scenarios are constructed in such a way as to fit geopolitical priorities and pursuits, taking also into account the strengths and weaknesses of the big players and the relevant historical experience in the Region.

The Russo-American plan on Syria (September 2013) and the recent agreement (23-24 November 2013) on Iran underline the development of a strategic understanding between U.S. and Russia at least as far as the Region is concerned and the (conditional) strengthening of the geopolitical status of Iran as a 'power balance' against the intransigence of Israel. Note at this point that the preparations of Russo-American plan on Syria were masterfully disguised behind the staged Cold War climate in the Obama-Putin political relations to avoid the 'annoying eyes' of Berlin. We strongly believe that this Russo-American cooperation is part of an American plan to draw the interest of Moscow towards the Middle East (an area in which U.S. is the principal player) and in this way to satisfy three objectives: (i) to weaken the strategic partnership between Berlin and Moscow, (ii) to soften the intransigence of Israel and (iii) to obtain more "degrees of freedom" for their Middle East policies. After all this is an old recipe applied successfully in the second half of 19th century by British and French in their efforts to destroy the Russo-German alliance. At this point one should recall the two strategic obstacles U.S. is encountering in Europe and the Middle East. The intransigence of Germany as far as Euro-zone austerity policies are concerned and the intransigence of Israel as far as a diplomatic solution of Iranian problem is concerned. At the same time, the existence of a deep strategic understanding between Germany and Israel escalates enormously the complications emanating from the above intransigent attitudes making it a very hard problem even for the skillful American diplomacy to solve. Indicative of the German-Israeli understanding is an interview for the September 13, 2013 edition of the publication Jewish Voice from Germany, Merkel – when asked about the Iranian

nuclear weapons threat directed at Israel – said, “That means that we’ll never be neutral and that Israel can be sure of our support when it comes to ensuring its security. That’s why I also said that Germany’s support for Israel’s security is part of our national ethos, our *raison d’être*.” (Jerusalem Post, 15/9/2013).

The worst case scenario

The author of this study wishes its findings to be proved wrong in the forthcoming test of time. If not, then in the best case the Region will soon cry for the death of hundreds of thousands of fighters and civilians and in the worst case for millions of dead. In any case the political, diplomatic and defense establishments of U.K., Germany, U.S., Israel, Turkey and Russia will soon undergo their hardest tests since WWII.

In the case warlike frontiers re-design scenarios prevail over peace then, as we estimate, the **net winners will include Israel and Russia** with Britain and Germany entering a long period of political and economic decline. In the case Moscow risks to deploy massive land forces in the Region then U.S. will face a painful deadlock since mass deployment of land forces by them (to face Russians) is out of question. In such a case they will limit their presence in the shores of Eastern Mediterranean where their powerful navy can secure only the geopolitical gravity center of Cyprus. Then, as a result, U.S. will enter a long period of inner speculation that will ‘inflate’ domestic problems. Finally **Turkey is a special case**. The country has already achieved ‘critical mass’ advances in the economic, defense and scientific/technological sectors and is equipped with one of the most advanced elites of Europe. As a consequence, even under the worst case scenario (which will not affect its geo-economic gravity areas), Turkey is expected to be firmly upgraded to the status of one of the five big western European powers (appendix 1 contains a series of analyses of external and internal geo-economic dynamics of Turkey).

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A. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A1. Strategic priorities and pursuits

Karkazis, Vidakis and Baltos (2012) presented an analysis of U.S.’s strategic geopolitical priorities and pursuits in the 21st century and Karkazis and Vidakis (2013) an analysis of U.S.’s energy policies. The above analysis establishes the following two strategic priorities as the leading ones for U.S.’s foreign policy:

- Maximum possible control over the energy resources and the energy routes of the planet.

Note 1. The ‘energy avidity’ of U.S. has reached the levels of an ‘obsession’ which (under certain circumstances) may provoke fatal decision making in the geopolitical game.

- Pursuit of power balancing policies in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia

Note 2. The pursuit of the above policies is highly influenced by the British historical paradigm.

A2. Maximum possible control over the energy resources and the energy routes of the planet

The rapid depletion of the planet’s oil resources (especially of North Sea) will intensify the efforts of global geopolitical players to exercise tight control over them. The Middle East possesses 65% of global oil reserves which are characterized by low mining costs. Iraq is probably situated on the largest source of untapped oil reserves in the Middle East. According to analyses by the US

government, it is estimated that Iraq has at least 432 billion barrels of untapped oil reserves and perhaps exceed those of Saudi Arabia⁶⁵. Therefore, the strategic importance of Iraq and the entire Middle East, in a world where production in most of the oil sources is close to if not at the maximum, will increase in the coming years. Moreover, the fact that the cost of extraction and transportation of oil in the Gulf Region is very low compared to other production areas increases the exporting-capacity of its oil-producing countries. Also Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia possess vast quantities of natural gas. As a consequence the above areas (and in particular Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt) have the highest geopolitical significance for U.S.

A2.1. The energy policy of U.S. in the Middle East. A historical review

Extracts from a paper of J.Karkazis and I.Vidakis having the above title and published in the journal "Defense & Security Annals", Issue 3, April 2013.

...The Middle East is rich in oil, possessing more than two thirds of the proven reserves in the world, with estimations predicting their future growth⁶⁶. These prospects offer to the oil producing countries of the Region the opportunity to play an important role in the energy security issues of the global economy in general and of U.S. in particular. The discovery of new energy reserves in Central Asia, the Caspian Sea and Russia, despite initial overestimation, are not considered adequate to cover the needs of the global economy and ultimately to reduce the dependence of developed countries on the Gulf oil.

In September 2001, Dr. Cambell, chairman of 'The British Cabinet Office on Energy Policy', after a thorough examination of strategic energy issues, came to the conclusion that the world's hydrocarbon reserves are significantly impaired and the current access to abundant and cheap oil will be gradually eliminated mainly due to the rising demand from China and India. Increased global oil demands in combination with the dramatic reduction of oil reserves in North Sea, Alaska, Mexico, Russia and Nigeria⁶⁷ cannot allow for even a modest global economic growth over the coming decades

In May 2003, Dr. Simmons, an energy expert and advisor to president Bush, estimated that the world production is already at a maximum level - thus a reduction in global supply would have devastating effects on the global economy in the sectors of transport and food industry. Meanwhile, the statistics on finding new sources are quite alarming⁶⁸.

Both specialists (Campbell and Simmons) agree that the only territories in the world that continue to have substantial untapped oil reserves remain those of the broader Middle East⁶⁹. The examination resulted in a common triangular geological formation, in which 65% of global reserves with low mining costs are included and which covers five countries: Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, with a focus on Qatar. Iraq is probably situated on the largest source of untapped oil reserves in the Middle East. According to analyses by the US government, it is estimated that Iraq has at least 432 billion barrels of untapped oil reserves and perhaps exceed those of Saudi Arabia⁷⁰. Therefore, the strategic importance of Iraq and of the entire Middle East, in a world where production in most of the oil sources is close to if not at the maximum, will increase in the coming years. Moreover, the fact that the cost of extraction and transportation of oil in the Gulf

⁶⁵Engdahl, p. 261.

⁶⁶<http://chartsbin.com/view/c>

ek and <http://thenewgreatgame.blogspot.gr/2011/01/oil-reserves-by-country-as-of-nov-20.html>

⁶⁷Engdahl, p. 259.

⁶⁸Engdahl, p. 260.

⁶⁹Although published and opposing views referring mainly to non-conventional fossil

<http://www.radford.edu/~wkovarik/oil/>

⁷⁰Engdahl, p. 261.

Region is very low compared to other production areas increases the exporting-capacity of oil-producing countries.

The US strategy in the Region during the Cold War, aimed primarily to ensure the geo-strategic control of the Gulf region and to prevent any action that would allow oil exploitation by hostile actors, from the producers themselves, from economic rivals of Washington and perhaps by the then USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the US appeared to be striving for the political but also the overall stability and security in the Region and for the avoidance of tension, which would have a significant impact on the supply of oil in the world markets.

The Gulf countries are not the main source of supply for the US and therefore their dependence on oil from the Region is not direct but indirect. In contrast, for the global economy, the Middle East is the main source of energy security (<http://world.bymap.org/OilImports.html>). A political instability in the Region will significantly reduce global supply and lead to higher prices - this would have indirectly negative consequences for the US economy, although the US federal government does not publicly accept it. Already high prices, when they are formed in the oil market, influence the international economy by increasing inflation and decreasing world production and growth. However, the whole issue is more complicated.

Another aspect of US strategy in the Middle East lies in the great dependence of Europe, Japan and Asian countries on oil from the Region. Thus the energy resource control in the Persian Gulf enables Washington to exercise significant power and influence on these countries and generally to hold control of global oil production and flow⁷¹. Additionally the US consider that oil is a "strategic weapon" that affects their role in the international system and whoever affects the supply and pricing, has power⁷². It should not be a surprise then that many argue that the war on terrorism is another way of expanding energy US interests in the Region⁷³.

One should take into account that historically, the American companies, acting primarily within the US, followed slightly different approaches from those of their European competitors, because they started their work in a protected environment. Oil was produced in the country and didn't face the risk of being undermined by imports. Therefore they managed to develop a strong market base and wealth accumulation in the US before expanding abroad. Furthermore, the US until WWI argued for national economic protection by limiting "the gates" to investors from abroad. From the perspective of competition, the British and the Dutch corporations, since they had not found oil inside their countries, they were forced from the outset to find oil reserves in other territories with additional costs. In the 19th century trading companies of Europe had already begun oil explorations in the Middle East, the Caspian Sea, Africa and Asia. This meant to cover large distances in the Pacific Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea. On the contrary, in the US trade was developed domestically and regionally and then extended worldwide as the technology of pipelines and railways developed. Concluding, European companies were operating at increased risk because they not only had to find oil in remote areas, but also to negotiate and carry it in their countries. However, regardless of their form and characteristics, oil companies with headquarters in the US and Europe, became soon competitors⁷⁴.

Furthermore, it is noted that the US during WWI, in the context of developing (geo)energy competition, supported indirectly but dynamically oil companies. In 1923 the Federal Trade Commission aided this official US Government policy. All US embassies and diplomatic missions received the following memo on August 16, 1919:

⁷¹Grivas, p. 73 & 262. Roberts, p. 160, Delastic, pp.11-17.

⁷²Engdahl, p. 103.

⁷³Billon & Khatibl, pp. 109-137.

⁷⁴Falola & Genova, pp. 52-53.

“Gentlemen: The vital importance of securing adequate supplies of mineral oil, both for present and future needs of the United States has been forcibly brought to the attention of the Department (the State Department). Nationals of various countries and concession for mineral oil rights are being actively sought are aggressively conducting the development of proven fields of exploration of new areas in many parts of the world. It is desired to have the most complete and recent information regarding such activities either by United States citizens or by others”.

.....

A4. Energy domination and power balancing policies in the Middle East

Threats

1. The German “Mittlerer Osten Politik” and in particular the intense economic and cultural penetration of Germany in Turkey and Cyprus
2. The Russian grand visions and designs in the Middle East
3. The Turkish ‘independent-minded’ foreign policy pursuits, especially Erdogan’s grand (Islamist) visions and designs in the Middle East and Turkey’s intense military and political involvement in Syria (supply of anti-Assad’s forces with military equipment and advisors and intensifying efforts to establish herself as the ‘grand protégé’ of the Syrian opposition).
4. The Iranian grand visions and designs in the Middle East
5. At a secondary level, the Israeli ‘independent-minded’ foreign policy pursuits and the assertiveness and stubbornness in their implementation.

Note 4. It seems that (unfortunately) for U.S. there is no other reliable and viable alternative geopolitical partnership (for the moment) in the Middle East except for Israel. Fortunately for Israel the options for pursuing a more independent foreign policy in the Region are more than one (for example achieving a geopolitical understanding with Russians).

Pursuits

Most of them may be considered as a part of a major ‘**frontier re-design**’ plan in the Middle East.

1. Destabilization and then change of the theocratic regime of Iran and elimination of its nuclear capabilities. Establishment of a pro-western and obedient regime in Iran.
2. Destabilization and then change of the Islamist regime in Turkey. Establishment, preferably, of a milder Islamist regime (of Gulen type) or re-establishment of the previous Kemalist regime, although in the latter case Israel will exercise an alarmingly high influence on it.
- 2a. Undermine the political, economic and military influence of Turkey in the Region and particularly its military and political penetration in Syria.
3. Creation of a great Kurdistan, a pro-American loose political and mainly military entity controlling the main water and oil resources of the Middle East.
4. Federalization of Syria and establishment of control over the Syrian Gates.
5. Keeping Russians at a ‘safe distance’ from Middle East geopolitical gravity areas.
6. Weaken the alarmingly increasing German penetration in the Region.

.....

B. ISRAEL

B1. Geopolitical environment

...Instead, an **Israeli-Iranian axis** could be the basis of a sustainable solution to the security problem of the Region, under the condition, of course, that Iran’s regime is removed from power and democracy is firmly established in the country, and also under the condition that its nuclear capabilities are reduced to such a level that it could not threaten Israel and the Region at least for a generation’s time.

...Also, the case of frictions between Israel and America cannot be disregarded, especially in view of the recent (controversial) announcement of the vision of President Obama for Israel to go back to the borders of 1967, a vision that cannot stand the scrutiny of (nuclear missiles) defense and security

analysts since these borders (with Jordan) are **absolutely** necessary for the anti-ballistic defense of Israel especially in the case of the theory of “nuclear blast windows” (Defense & Security Annals, issue 1, pgs 81-94). Consequently, President Obama’s announcement can be considered **more of a kind of pressure** to Israel to be more flexible rather than a prerequisite for drafting the ‘road map’ towards a viable security arrangement in the Region. Even in the case Israel retains its strategic outposts in the Jordanian borders, even in this case Israel will face extreme difficulties in defending itself in the case of an Iranian ‘synchronized multiple’ ballistic nuclear attack. In any case, two strategic threats are waiting for Israel’s response in the medium-long term: (a) the first is related to its extremely small size and to the extremely high population densities in the northern part of it (which will dangerously magnify the impact of a possible nuclear attack to this part of the country) an issue that can be dealt through a ‘special’ relationship with Jordan, incorporating the space of both countries in a **‘joint security continuum’** and (b) the second is related to the ‘unpredictability’ or the ‘deviating path’ of American initiatives (especially of US presidents) with relation to Israel’s strategic security concerns, an issue that will force sooner or later the decision-makers of Israel to re-assess the net benefits drawn by the ‘single-dimensional’ logic of their relations with America against the benefits drawn by a **‘multi-dimensional’ development** of their foreign strategic relations (with first candidate in this re-assessment being Russia).

B2. THREATS

1. The Iranian grand visions and designs in the Middle East
2. The Turkish ‘independent-minded’ foreign policy pursuits, especially Erdogan’s grand (Islamist) visions and designs in the Middle East and the intense military and political involvement in Syria (supply of anti-Assad forces with military equipment and advisors and intensifying efforts to establish herself as the ‘grand protégé’ of the Syrian opposition). Also Erdogan’s extreme anti-Israeli rhetoric and his policy of persecuting/neutralizing key pro-Israeli Kemalists and sympathizers mainly in the defense sector.
3. Lebanese and Palestinian extremist groups (Hamas and Hezbollah)
4. At a secondary level, the British geo-strategic dogma in the Middle East

B3. PURSUITS

Most of them may be considered as a part of a major **‘frontier re-design’** plan in the Middle East.

1. Destabilization and then change of the theocratic regime in Iran and elimination of its nuclear capabilities. Establishment of a pro-western regime in Iran.
 - 1a. In the long term, establishment of an Israeli-Iranian geopolitical understanding as a balance against Arab/Sunni threats.
2. Destabilization and then change of the Islamist regime in Turkey. Re-establishment, preferably, of the previous Kemalist regime, or establishment of a milder Islamist regime (of Gulen type).
 - 2a. Undermine the political, economic and military penetration of Turkey in the Region and particularly in Syria.
3. Creation of a great Kurdistan, a pro-Israeli loose political and mainly military entity controlling the main water and oil resources of the Middle East.
7. Federalization of Syria and establishment of control over the Syrian Gates.
8. Enhancing its geopolitical understanding with Moscow by keeping them at a ‘safe distance’ from Middle East geopolitical gravity areas but in any case giving them more ‘space’ (compared to the Americans) in the post-crisis era both in Syria and Iran.
9. Retaining its special relationship and strategic understanding with Germany

Note 5. Extracts from:

THE GEOPOLITICAL DESIGNS OF GERMANY AND THE LEGACY OF 'OSTPOLITIK'

John Karkazis (Strategic Reports, Issue G11, October 2011)

The special relationship and the strategic understanding with Israel

... "Strategic military cooperation between the two countries was initiated around the end of Kohl's chancellorship and was based on the production of strategic weapons in the context of which Germany was equipping the state-of-the-art main battle tank of Israel (Merkava) with diesel engines and also supplying the Israeli navy with 6 "Dolphin 800" class submarines (the most sophisticated submarines worldwide) capable of carrying cruise missiles equipped with nuclear warheads. As a result of the above cooperation Germany acquired (already from late 1990s) advanced information on the Israeli designs regarding Iran, the forthcoming nuclear crisis in the Middle East and the subsequent energy crisis." ...

... "Germany is Israel's most important trading partner in the EU." ...

References. R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15

C. UNITED KINGDOM

C1. Geopolitical environment

C1.1. The origins of energy security: British energy policy in the Middle East

Extracts from a paper of I.Vidakis having the above title and published in the journal "Defense and Security Annals", Issue 3, April 2013

...The energy policy of a state is mostly defined by its national interests, which in turn are mainly specified by its needs. Specifically, a country can: (i) consume energy, importing part of it when its own resources don't suffice to cover domestic demand, (ii) produce energy, exporting part of it if production over covers domestic demand and (iii) transport hydrocarbons, through its territory (pipelines) and its flag (commercial fleet).

Britain in 1912 took the decision to use oil in its naval fleet in order to be able to confront from a superior position the growing navy of its geo-political opponent Germany - (changing from the energy safe Welsh coal to the unstable Persian oil). Nevertheless, Britain didn't have autonomy, (internal sources of oil) as, for example, the USA did. So ever since, Britain structured its foreign and diplomatic policy, with main shaft the assurance of its access to energy resources of other countries till 1973, when the commercial exploitation of the North Sea deposits was achieved.

However, the rapid exhaustion of the deposits of North Sea oil combined with the obsessively mistaken decisions of its political leadership, endangered Britain to fall off the category of the great European powers, with aspirations of dominance on geopolitical issues and regions, to a state of energy deficiency. As a result, British example is extremely instructive: regarding the issues of geopolitics and **geo-energy** possible errors have a painful impact on a long-term basis. Of course, the reaction of the British is expected to be interesting in that case - it has a rich experience from the past, when it managed to control the oil quantities that it needed, without being itself an oil producing country.

The forthcoming years are expected to bring unprecedented levels of turmoil (inner religious and political conflicts and external interventions by the conflicting interests of great powers) in the Middle East since this region is basically the "geo energy deposit" of the planet. In this geopolitical canvas, strategic and financial interests, competitions and benefits are interrelated. The substantial involvement of E.U. in its neighboring space (Middle East and North Africa), can effectively contribute to the upgrading of the socio-economic growth of all states, with common benefits for all. Britain is expected to play an instrumental role in these efforts as a result of its deep understanding of the Region since for centuries and to a large degree it was shaping its fortunes. The key of policy is the activation of the Euro Mediterranean cooperation with centers - links the Mediterranean islands,

(Sicily, Malta, Crete, Cyprus), the application of the rules of the international law and the cooperation with the neighboring Arab countries and Israel.

C1.2. The pursuit of a new order in Europe and the Middle East

....Up to World War II the geo-strategic dogma of Britain was heavily focusing on the exploitation of the geo-strategic value of Rimland. Since the beginning of 20th century and up to World War II, Britain had imposed on the two geo-strategic gravity poles of it the principle of the ‘balance of powers’: in the western pole through the Entente Cordiale and in the eastern pole through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. At the same time Britain imposed its control upon all geo-strategic sea ‘passages’ along the coastal edges of Rimland (English Channel, Gibraltar, Suez Canal, Cape of Good Hope and Singapore) through which it controlled the Oceans and the trade routes supplying these two geo-strategic poles with imported food and other strategic raw materials.

If we take a view of this global geopolitical architecture of the West we easily understand that the Sea of Japan and the Mediterranean Sea are the two major gravity areas (poles) of that system of dominance and also of the western geo-political architecture. In this context the geo-strategic value of Cyprus is of paramount importance for the West and particularly for Britain which has two military bases in the island recently ‘upgraded’ to small state entities for “better geo-political protection”.

The enormous geopolitical significance of the above two poles is shown by the two fierce civil wars erupted in them (the Greek and Korean civil wars) soon after the end of World War II and also the wars in Vietnam and in the Middle East. Most of these wars were directly or indirectly emanating from the conflicts between the Great Naval and Heartland Powers, as their competition was escalating in the frame of the newly re-defined “eastern question”.

After World War II Britain (with the ‘help’ of USA) lost its control over most of its colonial possessions and of the strategic passages it controlled along Rimland but tried fiercely to retain its control over the remaining two passages of Gibraltar and Falkland Islands and above all on its military bases in Cyprus, the most strategic spot in the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. After all, without these (last) strategic spots Britain would be left with no geo-strategic possessions to ‘feed’ the imagination and sustain the interest of its elite geo-strategic think tanks on the grand vision of ‘British Rule over the Seas’. Britain’s strategic option to retain its control over Cyprus at any cost is thus obvious and to a large extent explains and determines its policies towards Greece, Turkey, France, Germany, Russia and Israel.

At the level of ‘geo-political power balancing policies’ in Cyprus, to ‘out-weight’ the profound rights and the relatively high socio-economic and cultural power of the Greek Side in the island, Britain already follows a policy of enhancing/supporting Turkey and at the same time of keeping Greece weak enough to demand and impose a solution of the Cyprus problem interfering with its interests there. After all, the comments of Cypriot President Dimitris Christofias, made in 2008 (Guardian, 25 February 2008) that “the British bases in the island are a colonial bloodstain” are characteristic of the Greek Side attitudes on this issue. At the same time Britain should also encounter the German and the Russian influence in the island (the recent visit of the German Chancellor in the island, her supportive for Cyprus Government comments and her criticism over Turkish intransigence are quite indicative facts). In the presence of Germany’s ‘Ostpolitik’ initiatives and the enhancement of Russo-German economic relations, the German and Russian legitimate interests in Cyprus are becoming even more stressing for Britain.

The above ‘power balancing’ pursuits are expected to negatively influence Britain’s attitudes towards the possibility of the creation of a Great Kurdistan with the incorporation of Turkish territories in it. As a consequence Britain is expected to oppose frontier re-design scenarios in the Middle East

promoted mainly by Western think tanks and interests. Furthermore Britain is expected to be particularly skeptical with the possibility of toppling of the regimes in Syria and Iran with whom Turkey has developed economic and military ties. On the contrary and in order to further enhance Turkey's position and its own interests in the area Britain is expected to promote a tri-polar regional security system based on an alliance/understanding between **Turkey, Israel and Iran** working in parallel for the weakening of Greek-Israeli rapprochement (the idea of the above tri-polar system has been recently put forward for discussion in western think tanks). Such a tri-polar system, although it has a powerful reasoning behind it, it will impose on Israel too many constraints and risks and at the same time will give Turkey enough room and opportunities for diplomatic manoeuvres which could offer her the upper hand in its duel with Israel. Thus, the above system, has rather little chances to survive the hard test of time as a result of the ideological imbalances related to the concept "the two most powerful Muslim powers in the Region are coming to an understanding with one non Muslim country which has been up to now regarded by them as a competitor or even as an enemy".

.... On the other hand, the massive electronic intelligence gathering installations and the strategic (nuclear) bomber facilities of British bases in Cyprus (located at a distance of a few hundred kilometers from strategic Israeli military installations) constitute (most probably) a source of intense (but not openly expressed) anxiety for Israelis, perhaps the second most serious after Iran. As a consequence, it is very probable that in the short term the American and Israeli interests and designs in the area will interfere with the British ones (the German interests are already interfering with them) although in the long term Britain is expected to come to a geo-political understanding with Israelis and Americans since it has a very persuasive vision and a characteristic persistence and methodic approach towards the realization of its strategic diplomatic goals.

Britain and the Middle East tri-pole

...To further 'arm' its bases in Cyprus and enhance its geo-political power in the Middle East there exists accumulative evidence that Britain is promoting its designs for an understanding between Israel, Syria, Turkey and Iran⁴. In the above context it tries hard to 'sell' this geo-political product to Americans (especially targeting presidential circles), Europeans, legislators of Jewish origin in London, Israel etc., carefully developing different 'packages' to make it more attractive to different 'audiences'. According to credible sources British are going even further by introducing these geo-political designs into NATO think tanks. In the context of these designs efforts are made in two fronts: (1) to persuade Israel to go back with its plans to bomb Iran and give diplomacy more time (an option carrying within it the risk of giving to Iran the much needed time to reach the 'no-return-point' of developing nuclear warheads for its missiles and introducing in this way some form of nuclear balance in the region which would offer the opportunity to Britain to play a mediating role with plans tailor-made for the occasion), (2) to persuade Europe and America not to proceed with harsh measures against Syria aiming to topple its government with which its ally Turkey has developed a strategic understanding and ties; in the mean time Iran has been persuaded/forced (probably through Turkish diplomatic 'massage') to propose an Islamic conference on the issue of Syria most probably aiming to give time to the Anglo-Turkish camp to work on a 'convenient' successor regime/government in Syria.

Indicative of the above British designs are the contents (and the handling) of an interview of Stephen Sackur (a British journalist and BBC foreign affairs correspondent with strong connections in US) with John Bolton, the former US ambassador to UN. Sackur, by pressing aggressively Bolton (who made critical comments on Obama's foreign policies and on the handling by NATO of its Libyan adventure) in question-slipping suggestions unfolded certain facets of relevant British designs: he (Sackur) was critical on Middle East Bush administration policies and on former vice-president's remarks regarding Hilary Clinton's presidential future and also he was critical on Israel's designs to bomb Iran. On the contrary, he seemed to be highly supportive of British intervention in Libya and of 'soft' international reactions against Syria and Iran.

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E. GERMANY

The Mittlerer Osten Politik

...High priority is given to the exploitation (political and diplomatic) of the Arab Spring and to the subsequent support of the Arab Spring forces operating at the political and the military level (examples: German navy intel ship passes information to Syrian rebels in their fight against Assad forces; Foreign Minister Westerwelle introduced proposals for a new Transformation Partnership, in the context of which Egypt is receiving support as an equal partner in its efforts to implement democratic change; with the support of the Federal Foreign Office, the Tahrir Lounge was opened on the premises of the Goethe Institute in Cairo in April 2011; this move was designed to provide those who were instrumental in instigating democratic change in Egypt with a meeting place in the heart of Cairo where they can exchange ideas on the country's future).

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F. THE ROAD MAP TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW ORDER IN THE REGION

F1. Converging and diverging geopolitical pursuits

Based on the previous analysis we can distinguish two groups of powers with **diverging** geopolitical pursuits in the Region. The first group consists of **U.S. and Israel** which have common strategic pursuits there (frontier re-design, Great Kurdistan, Iran and Turkey) and the second group consists of **U.K. and Turkey** which are against re-design of frontiers in the Region and are in favor of balance of powers in it (mainly between Israel and Iran)

The above diverging geopolitical pursuits between these two groups and especially between U.S. and its traditional ally Britain made **Americans and Israelis very skeptical on the issue of British participation in the initial stage of intervention**. On the other hand, Putin's remarks on the issue of chemical weapons incident (the pretext for the intervention) are fully justified on the ground that the Syrian regime would have no reason or incentive to use them especially on the eve of international inspector's visit to Syria and at the very moment its forces appeared to be victorious over the rebels. Taking the above facts into consideration the non participation of U.K. in the initial step of the intervention could be either caused by U.S. insistence to use as pretext for the intervention a not fully proved incident (in order to force the British to abstain voluntarily) or it was caused by British themselves (on the ground of highly diverging pursuits) who staged a parliamentary rejection of the participation to hide their true geo-political motives. The former hypothesis seems more probable since Americans and Israelis had an extra reason except for the 'diverging pursuits': they distrusted the British and were suspicious of the possible leak of vital information, regarding the intervention, to Turkey (one of the targets of the campaign).

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F3. The objectives of the American intervention

The imminent air bombing of Syria is simply the initial step of a wider American plan for a major military intervention in the Region with multiple objectives and with an Israeli participation extending to most (but not all) of its objectives. We estimate that American objectives are:

- Creation of a **great Kurdish protectorate**^{*1} to act as the “policeman” of American (and possibly Israeli) interests in the wider area and as a state barrier against Russian expansionism (an objective shared by both partners).
- Creation of a federal Syria encompassing a highly autonomous Kurdish state and an Allewite state accommodating Russian naval bases. To draw the interest of Moscow towards a Russo-American geopolitical understanding and subsequently **weaken the Russo-German strategic partnership** Washington, besides the Russian naval bases, may also allow for the Russians to participate in some other parts of their plans, for example in the toppling of Tehran’s regime giving them some (preferably minor) role in the post war Iranian affairs (an objective shared by both partners).
- **Destabilization and then change of the theocratic regime in Iran and elimination of its nuclear capabilities.** Establishment of a pro-western and obedient regime in the country (an objective shared by both partners).
- **Undermine the political, economic and military influence of Turkey in the Region** and particularly its military and political penetration in Syria (an objective shared by both partners).
- **Destabilization and then change of the Islamist regime in Turkey.** Establishment, preferably, of a milder Islamist regime (of Gulen type) or re-establishment of the previous Kemalist regime, although in the latter case Israel will exercise an alarmingly high influence on it (an objective shared by both partners).
- **Keeping Russians at a ‘safe distance’ from Middle East geopolitical gravity areas.**
- **Weaken the alarmingly increasing German penetration in the Region.**

**1: a loose political and mainly military entity controlling the main water and oil resources of the Middle East.*

F4. The phases of the wider intervention scenario

The general frontier-re-design scenario will be most probably unfolded through several phases:

- The initial phase of the intervention, the imminent bombardment of Syria, is expected to have two objectives:
 - (a) U.S. (as they have already announced) planned the initial phase of its military intervention in Syria (the missile strikes) to be short enough (to cover no more than a few weeks) and narrow enough as far as targeting is concerned. After all, the whole operation (the wider intervention and the Region’s frontiers re-design) has been planned very carefully in all its details by Washington and Jerusalem and its initial (‘reconnaissance’) phase will be short and narrow enough not to provoke unmanageable international reactions. **This phase is most probably designed to test the readiness, quality and effectiveness of Russian state-of-art military equipment and installations in Syria and explore the decisiveness and readiness of military and diplomatic response and reaction tactics of Russia, Syria and Turkey (and of course of Germany and UK at the diplomatic level).** After this ‘reconnaissance’ phase a re-assessment of the American and Israeli tactics will take place during which a new round of more ‘persuasive’ information will be leaked to the international community to lower down the negative reactions to the next, more decisive, more lethal and more time consuming phase of the intervention. The set of targets (economic, military and diplomatic) of this phase, besides Syria, includes also Turkey, Iran, Germany and possibly Russia.
 - (b) **The second objective is the delivery of a very persuasive message to Assad’s regime to cut ‘communications’ with Iran and start (possibly secret) talks with Washington.**
- The second phase, which is expected to be more time consuming and wider in targeting, will aim to:
 - (a) **destroy Syria’s supply and communication lines with Iran** and (b) **the political and mainly military enhancement of Syrian Kurds.** At the end of this phase a ‘de facto’ federalization of Syria will have been attained which will offer Syrian Kurds an advanced political and mainly military autonomy (certain aspects of this issue are analyzed in section F6)

- The third phase will aim to some kind of political and military integration of the Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan putting the armed forces of the two parts under joint command. The total military power emanating from this integration (two to three hundred thousand fighters, see section F6) will be capable of undertaking two parallel missions: (a) perform offensive operations and instigating mass unrest in Iranian Kurdistan and (b) undertake defensive operations against possible Turkish attack from the north. At the end of this phase Kurdish army will be ready to send strong guerilla forces inside southern Turkey.
- The fourth phase will aim to destabilization and change of Iranian regime (certain aspects of this issue is analyzed in section F7)
- The fifth phase will aim to destabilization and change of Turkish regime.

In the context of the above scenario Turkey will face the following painful dilemma:

- (a) Either to send adequate armed forces inside Syria (early enough and before the second phase) to destroy the military power of the Kurds and practically stop the federalization of the country and the creation of an autonomous Kurdish state entity.
- (b) Or to postpone its reaction for a later time (in order to avoid the American harsh reactions) when it will be forced to confront the combined force of Syrian and Iraqi Kurds.

F4.1 The risks of a Turkish offensive against Syria or Iraq

Note that a large-scale Turkish offensive against Syria or Iraq will offer the Americans the much waited opportunity to denounce this action as an act of extreme aggression of the Islamist regime of Turkey (and of Erdogan himself) against an independent country without U.N./S.C. permission. Then the Americans (and their partners) will unleash the full strength of their propaganda apparatus against the Islamist regime and Erdogan himself, they will instigate extreme social and ethnic unrest in the country and they will give the 'green line' (and adequate support) to Kurdish guerilla forces to enter Turkey 'en mass'. **At this point one should recall the fierce reaction of John Kerry (the American foreign secretary) against the Islamist regime of Turkey and Erdogan himself during the recent riots in Istanbul. The swiftness and the fierceness of his reaction against an ally (surpassing all other reactions, Germany's and U.K.'s included) was a surprise to many. But if one examines his reaction in the context of the above frontier re-design scenario then could easily conclude that this reaction may well be a 'preparatory' propaganda action in the geopolitical game that will follow.**

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A GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH OF IRAN THE SIMPLE COMPLEXITY OF ITS RELATION WITH THE WEST, ISRAEL, SYRIA AND SAUDI ARABIA

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Extracts

The religious factor (the case of Syria)

The religious level of analysis also explains why it is that because of the Syria crisis Hamas is drawn away from Hezbollah and Iran, with which it cooperated for years. Until recently, Damascus hosted the exile leadership of the Palestine Sunni Hamas, with the blessing of Tehran, whereas even after the Israeli attack in Gaza in November 2012, Hamas thanked Iran for its assistance.⁷⁵ Still the civil war in Syria created a major geopolitical issue due to its religious influence. As known, Assad was supported by the alawite Shia (may it be heretic or secular) minority, oppressing the Sunni majority. It is obvious that the Shia block, with Iran taking the lead, was in favor of Assad, whereas Hamas supported the opposition and so did the rest of the Sunni Arabs. Should this level of analysis disappear, the support of the Gulf monarchies to Sunni political Islam in the context of the “Arab Spring” uprisings could not be explained. Potentially, the overthrow under the burden of peoples’ will of Assad kind regimes, could lead to “domino” uprisings in the Gulf. In addition, the religious level of analysis, suggests fear of Israel and the U.S. for a military intervention in Syria. Who would follow the Baath, which is at least a secular regime? Would the West want Muslim extremists in power? Would it want Brother Muslims, who are moderate but gain significant power? And it goes without saying that without Iran’s support, Assad would easily fall. Nevertheless, Tehran substituted the rhetoric of “Syria being the 35th province of Iran” with a contained stance and relative silence.⁷⁶

Concluding, Iran “serves” the West when it comes to keeping a balance at a religious level. Should it disappear, Brother Muslims would dominate “religiously” and “politically” everywhere. This analysis in no way does it imply that the Iranians will suddenly become Sunni. Political Sunni Islam will become however stronger in Iraq and will easily dominate in Syria, perhaps resulting in the radicalization of the moderate Turkish Islam. Therefore, for reasons of preserving the religious balances, but for reasons of “protection selling” in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies, the U.S. does not want an attack against Iran. Even Israel which soundly threatens with unilateral action⁷⁷, knows au fond that it needs Iran for the aforementioned reasons. It cannot be disregarded that its support for Assad opponents is minimal and reluctant, since until recently it seemed to fully adopt the British saying “better the devil you know” (loosely translated to portrait Assad).

⁷⁵ See K. Aaron, “Gaza leader Haniyeh Thanks Iran For Helping Make Israel ‘Scream With Pain’”, *The Times of Israel*, November 22nd 2012, at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/gaza-leader-haniyeh-thanks-iran-for-helping-make-israel-scream-with-pain/> last accessed on May 12th 2013.

⁷⁶ M.A. Tabaar, “Iran’s Pragmatic Turn”, *Foreign Policy*, September 12th, 2013.

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THE SYRIAN ENERGY POLICIES OF THE “FOUR SEAS” AND THEIR GEOPOLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS

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Abstract

The article gives, first, a brief historical review of the development of the oil and natural gas sectors of Damascus. Next, the article focuses on oil pipeline networks in Syria, the geopolitical controversy introduced by them and the various investment projects in the energy sector pushed forward by the Syrian government. Finally, the article analyses president Assad’s grand energy policies of the “Four Seas” aiming to transform Syria to an energy networks hub in the Region and comments on the arising geopolitical repercussions.

Keywords : Energy, Energy Resources, Energy Policy, Energy Security, Syrian Energy Policy, Middle East.

JEL Classification Codes : A12, F50, N75, Q48.

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1. Introduction

According to the «U.S. Energy Information Administration» (EIA, 2013), Syria is the only oil producing country in the Eastern Mediterranean (an area including also Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus, and the Palestinian Territories). Syria produces relatively low quantities of hydrocarbons from land deposits. Oil is exported to Europe and natural gas is used to upgrade oil pumping operations and also for domestic production of electric energy.

On the other hand Syria’s location is strategic with respect to the security of energy flows and also as a hub in the energy transfer networks. Before the Syrian crisis the regional cooperation on energy, with the initiation of a number of major projects involving Syria, was proceeding at a fast pace. These plans regarded mainly the extension of existing energy supply networks to connect Syria with neighboring countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and also Azerbaijan) creating also an “added value” for the existing energy axes connecting Egypt and Lebanon.

Furthermore, the recent discovery of large quantities of hydrocarbon deposits in a relatively unexplored part of eastern Mediterranean Sea (between Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Syria and Lebanon) is expected to further enhance the geo-economic importance of Syria as an energy networks hub.

In this paper, after a brief review of the Syrian energy sector, we present an appropriate and justified interpretation of the energy policy of this Arab country, especially through the “model of geopolitics and geo-economics of energy” (“geo-energy approach”, Karkazis, Vidakis, Baltos, 2010).

At this point one should always bare in mind that an intense domination struggle from oil and for oil erupted among the big oil companies drawing, in many cases, the intervention of governments and other state organizations. Oil and gas can be (relatively) easily transformed into huge financial

resources and economic power through which a wide range of geopolitical pursuits (even the most contradictory ones) can be achieved. A characteristic example is the strong geopolitical alignment of Saudi Arabia, one of the most conservative countries of the Middle East and the world in general, with the U.S. the world champion of liberalism and of personal liberties.

Consequently, behind the scenes of the Syrian Crisis an undeclared war for energy supremacy and domination is taking place. From the time that certain critical safety, security and cost parameters of land energy routes became favorable (in combination with the newly discovered energy resources of Levantine Basin) Syria, mainly through its geographical position, achieved central geopolitical importance as a major hub in the energy networks of the Middle East. At the same time China and India participate in the production of oil in Syria (geo-economic benefits), Russia possesses military facilities in this country (geostrategic benefits) and Israel (still) prefers the security emanating from a familiar to it regime than the highly risky benefits from a regime change in this country (security benefits).

Conclusively, the ambitious plans of Damascus in the energy sector, its long term aims and its enhanced capabilities for materialization of its plans, put it in the “cyclone eye”: Syria became the center of a war for the hydrocarbons of the Middle East. The multiple military and mass media attacks (covered and uncovered) against this country are closely related to energy world competition. Furthermore, the analysis of the conflicting geopolitical interests and pursuits and of the mechanisms applied to promote them will enable us to better understand the process of “formation” of a New Order in the Region. In order to preserve the peace in the Region Turkey, Greece and Israel should work hard and methodically to achieve an understanding regarding the numerous facets of the energy issues on a medium and long term basis and the mutual benefits emanating from energy cooperation which will reduce the frictions that may arise from possible conflicting geopolitical interests.

2. Syria's Oil

Syria's current oil production and oil export levels are lower with comparison to 1990 ones whereas demand is constantly increasing due to Damascus policies of subsidizing oil products. According to the «Middle East Economic Survey» (MEES, 2011), Syria spent \$2.5Mn in oil product subsidies during the first half of 2011. Note that a major part of refined oil products had to be imported. The net exports-imports balance of payments in 2006 was positive (\$1.9Mn) but since then it quickly became negative, reaching -\$100 million 2008. Syria has announced a long term plan for the gradual abolition of these subsidies but the ongoing crisis caused a considerable delay in its realization. Syria's production of crude oil and its by-products in 2010 was 400,000 bbl/d. The annual report of «The Oil and Gas Journal» (EIA, 2013), estimated that Syria's total oil reserves were 2.5 billion barrels. The known oil reserves of the country are mainly located in the eastern regions of it along Euphrates River. Other smaller fields are located in the central part of the country.

The peak of country's oil production (582,000 bbl/d) occurred in 1996. Since then oil production rate was decreasing, going down to 387,000 bbl/d in 2010. Note that crude oil production represents 60% of total oil production of Syria.

The biggest and ripest for exploitation oil fields of Syria are Omar Al-Furat and Jbessa, which in 2010 were estimated to have a production capacity of 100,000 and 200,000 bbl/d respectively. The main oil production company is Al Furat Petroleum Company (AFPC), an oil conglomerate established in 1985 and consisted of Syrian Petroleum Corporation (SPC) with a 50% share, the Syrian Shell Petroleum Development (SSPD) with a 32% share and the Himalaya Energy Syria (HES), a conglomerate of China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the Indian Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) with a 18% share.

Syria has three oil import/export hub stations in the Mediterranean, all of them being under the management of Syrian Company for Oil Transportation (SCOT). Baniyas and Tartus are the main oil export ports of Syria followed by Latakia [1]. The oil terminal stations of the above ports are interconnected through a national pipeline system. In 2010 the net oil exports of Syria were estimated to be 109,000 bbl/d, approximately 7% lower than in the previous year. The oil exports of Syria are almost totally directed to European OECD countries, mainly in Germany, Italy, France and the Netherlands (EIA, 2013).

Foreign investments are vital for the improvement of oil production levels [2]. SPC directly controls half the oil production of Syria and participates with a 50% share in investments with foreign partners. SPC is also involved in the national efforts to revert the decreasing trend in the production and exports of oil pushing forward exploration and production projects in cooperation with foreign oil companies.

Since USA sanctions prohibit the participation of American companies in Syrian projects the country initially turned its attention to Chinese, Indian and European companies. Syrian government has received, since March 2010, a number of offers in response to a tender for hydrocarbon explorations in eight oil land fields. Total and Petro-Canada were the first foreign firms to be granted exploration permissions in 2011. Syria possesses also sea oil fields which are also open for exploration. The Syrian Ministry for Oil and Mineral Resources announced a tender for three coastal natural gas fields with 5 October 2011 being the terminal date for offer submissions. Furthermore, the above ministry in cooperation with the General Establishment of Geology and Mineral Resources (GEGMR) announced a new tender for oil exploration and production in the slate oil field of al-Khanasir, 60 miles southeast of Aleppo. The tender area consists of 14 sectors with total oil reserves estimated to be 39 billion tons. The deadline for the submission of offers was 30 November 2011.

Therefore as initial observation the interests of American companies and the U.S. could not be promoted in Syria compared with those of European, Russian and Chinese.

3. Syria's Pipelines

U.S. announced their decision to construct a huge pipeline network as early as February 1944. This network, having a total length equal to 2,000 km, aimed to connect Persian Gulf oil fields with Mediterranean ports. At the same time U.S. announced their plans to upgrade and extend the refineries of Bahrain, Alexandria and Haifa. The above plans were sound from strategic point of view because they would allow for U.S. to avoid sea routes which were too dangerous as a result of the war, not excluding of course the existence of other geo-strategic motives in the back of their minds. On the other hand, London foresaw behind these plans an aim of the United States to downgrade the role of Suez Canal (being under its control) and a long term plan to "americanize" the oil transport system in the Middle East. As a result the British proceeded with a protest to the Saudi King to stop the plans of Washington. Despite this protest the U.S. proceeded with their plans. The project was undertaken by the American oil company Aramco which constructed Tapline (TransArabian Pipeline) with a capacity of 500,000 bbl/d which connected the al-Zahran oilfields with the port of Sidon in Lebanon. Tapline became operational in 1950. The negotiations regarding Tapline played a decisive role in the relations of U.S. with Syria and Britain.

A pipeline partially competitive to Tapline was Middle East Pipeline (MEPL), a pipeline designed by a conglomerate of an Iranian-British oil company (with a majority share) and American firms. MEPL would connect Iranian oil fields with Syrian ports passing through Iraq [3].

After the Israeli-Arab War of 1967, the Tapline section crossing Golan Heights was set under Israeli control with the Israelis permitting the unobstructed function of it. As a result of continuous disputes

between Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon regarding the oil transport fees, the part of it beyond Jordan ceased to be functional in 1976. The rest of the pipeline, between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, continued to transport small quantities of oil until 1990 when Saudi Arabia interrupted the flow of oil as a result of the 1st Gulf War. Today the pipeline is unsuitable for oil transportation. Nevertheless, the Tapline remains a possible (and promising) path for the export of oil from the Persian Gulf to the West. A recent economic study has shown that the cost of transportation of oil through Tapline (with the port of Haifa as its export terminal) to Europe would be 40% lower than the corresponding sea (tanker) cost through the Suez Canal. In the beginning of 2005, the restoration of Tapline, at an estimated cost of \$300 million, was one of the strategic options under consideration by the government of Jordan in its efforts to cover its oil needs.

During the 1950s a second pipeline system was constructed to transport oil from Kirkuk, in northern Iraq, to the port of Baniyas in Syria and to the port of Tripoli in Lebanon.

The major part of this pipeline system, having a length of 800 km, was destroyed by the American air force in 2003 during the Iraqi War [4]. Recently, the governments of Iraq and Syria agreed to restore this pipeline system and to construct also a new one. Actually, in June 2011 Syria and Iraq signed a memorandum agreement for the restoration of the existing pipeline system (with a capacity of 800,000 bbl/d) and the construction of two new pipelines for the transportation of heavy-graded oil (with a capacity of 1.5 million bbl/d) and of lightgraded oil (with a capacity of 1.25 million bbl/d).

Besides the above two interstate pipeline systems, Syria has developed a domestic pipeline network for the transportation of crude oil and the products managed by SCOT. This network includes the Tel Adas – Tartus pipeline (345 miles and 250,000 bbl/d) which connects the Tel Adas oil fields with the port of Tartus with a sub-connection to Homs refinery and also a system of transport lines for the flow of Homs refinery oil products to the main urban centers of Syria.

Thus, from the beginning the geographical location of Syria and the Syrian ports were important for the handling of oil in the eastern Mediterranean.

4. Syria's Oil Refineries

According to the annual report of «The Oil and Gas Journal» (EIA, 2013) the total capacity of Syrian refineries was approximately 240,000 bbl/d. The two state refineries of Syria are located in Baniyas and Homs, having refinement capacities 133,000 bbl/d and 107,000 bbl/d respectively. Syria faces shortages with internal combustion fuel and diesel and a considerable increase of domestic refinement capacity is needed to meet demand. On the other hand, foreign oil companies hesitate to provide necessary investment capitals for the construction of new refineries in Syria without an adequate support from its government. In December 2010, Venezuela signed a memorandum of understanding for the construction of a refinery (with 140,000 bbl/d capacity) in Froklos, a project which had been suspended after an agreement for its construction in March 2008, (Syrian Oil & Gas News, 2009). Also, Chinese officials have discussions with the Syrian government on the construction of a refinery (with capacity 70,000 bbl/d) near Deir al-Zor oil fields, which is a considerably delayed project the realization of which should had been started in 2008.

5. Syria's Natural Gas

According to the annual report of «The Oil and Gas Journal» (EIA, 2013), the proved reserves of Syria's natural gas are estimated at the level of 8.5 trillion cubic feet (TCF). Sixty per cent of the above reserves are of the form «Associated Petroleum Gas» - (APG). In 2009, approximately one quarter of Syria's gross production of natural gas was used to upgrade oil pumping operations. The major part of gas production is directed to electric energy production and household users. Currently, the burning systems of all electricity production units of Syria are undergoing a modification process

to burn natural gas instead of petrol. As a result of the above changes the domestic demand for natural gas is expected to increase by 100% until 2020 [5]. Despite the fact that the extraction of Syria's natural gas is expected to follow an increasing trend, still it will remain inadequate to cover expected demand. As a result Damascus is planning to import increased quantities of natural gas. In 2009, Syria produced 219 BCF dry natural gas, consuming 251 BCF and exporting 32 BCF. Gas production reached a peak of 252 BCF in 2004, but it is expected to be increased in the near future since some of the (planned) land gas installations have become operational. On top of that, following a tender announced in March 2010 regarding 8 land gas fields, Total and Petro-Canada are expected to be the first companies to be granted exploration permits, (Syrian Oil & Gas News, 2010). Syria has also announced a tender for gas exploration in coastal sectors in eastern Mediterranean. It has been published (Osama Habib, The Daily Star, 2012), that the discovery of vast reserves of natural gas in coastal areas of Israel led to the revival of the interest for gas exploration in neighbouring coastal areas of Lebanon, Cyprus and Syria. Following the discouraging reactions to a tender announced by Syria in 2007, the Syrian Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources and the Syrian General Petroleum Corporation (GPC) selected three coastal lots to be included in a new tender with 5 October 2011 being a terminal date for the submission of offers. Note at this point that Lebanon decided to announce a tender for natural gas exploration in coastal areas in the first quarter of 2012 but due to problems in the organization of state infrastructures supporting the project the announcement of the tender was delayed for the end of the year (Karbuz, 2012).

6. Syria's Natural Gas Imports and Pipelines

Syria is planning to become soon a natural gas exporter. In the context of this plan Syria has completed the construction of a gas pipeline to Lebanon since 2003. Nevertheless, until 2009 the natural gas quantity available for delivery was insufficient and as a result (from mid-2008) Syria became an importer of gas. In 2008 Syria imported 5 BCF from Egypt through the Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP). The long term objective of Syria is to become a hub country in the Middle East energy pipeline networks interconnecting Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Azerbaijan. As a hub Syria will achieve multiple benefits: increased income from transfer fees and also increased quantities of available gas. In particular, through AGP Egyptian natural gas is transported to Jordan and Syria and through a special pipeline to Israel. Although Egypt cannot supply directly Lebanon with gas, nevertheless this takes place indirectly through an exchange agreement in the context of which Egypt supplies Syria with gas through AGP and Syria transfer analogous amount of gas to Lebanon through the Syria-Lebanon export pipeline. The above gas supply process to Lebanon has exhibited many problems especially after February 2011.

In 2009 Syria and Turkey signed a memorandum agreement according to which Ankara would construct a 56 miles pipeline inside its territories up to the borders with Syria and this pipeline would be connected with an extension of AGP pipeline (from Aleppo to Kilis) under construction by Syria. The above project was to be completed within 2012. According to this agreement Turkey would supply Syria with 17-35 BFC gas for 5 years. In June 2010 Syria and Azerbaijan signed a protocol according to which the latter would supply Syria with natural gas through Turkey starting from 2012. The above supply of Syria with gas (initially with 35 BFC annually up to 70 BFC until 2015) depended upon the completion of AGP pipeline extension needed to implement the connection of pipeline networks of Syria and Turkey.

As a next step to its plans to become an energy hub in the Middle East, Syria signed, in July 2011, an agreement with Iran and Iraq for the construction of Islamic Gas Pipeline, (IGP) aiming to the supply of European markets with natural gas, (Syrian Oil & Gas News, 2012). It regards a 3.100 miles pipeline capable of transporting 1.4 TCF/y of natural gas from the huge South Pars deposits to the Mediterranean coast (and Europe) through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. IGP, which does not pass through Turkey, has a capacity 30% larger than Nabucco pipeline which is planned to connect

Erzurum in Turkey with Austria. The construction of this pipeline is expected to last for 3-5 years and its cost is estimated to reach 10 bil \$. The U.S. dismissed reports that construction had begun on the pipeline, saying that this had been claimed repeatedly and that “plans by Iran to build a natural gas pipeline through Iraq to Syria may run into problems with economic sanctions” [6]. Note that this agreement, which reduces the importance of Turkey as an energy networks hub in the Middle East, coincides with the change in Ankara’s policy towards Damascus.

Finally one can stress the fact that IGP is compatible with the American policies of drastically reducing E.U. dependence on Russian natural gas.

All these developments and the plans of Damascus significantly increased the importance of Syria in the energy map of the Eastern Mediterranean and caused the U.S. response (Dinucci, 2013; Nafeez, 2013; Butter 2014; Maj. Taylor, 2014). We must not forget the dependency of U.S. on Middle East oil and that the great power rivalries for energy is continuous and strong (Kubicek, 2013).

7. Conclusions

It has been argued (Karkazis, Vidakis, Baltos, 2013: 104) that when Israel initiated in 2009 a huge program of oil and gas explorations it became clear that Eastern Mediterranean had entered in a new period of «energy geopolitics». Syria possesses a significant part of the mineral wealth of the area which attracts the interest of international oil companies. In this context, the “Four Seas” policies adopted by president Assad in the beginning of 2011 (only a few months before the eruption of the crisis) was aiming to transform Syria to an oil and gas transport hub connecting the energy sources of Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf with Mediterranean ports of Syria and Lebanon. IGP was another major investment plan with its completion expected for 2016. IGP presented an alternative option for the transportation of Iranian natural gas to European markets, an option not at all desirable by the Arab countries of the Gulf and especially Saudi Arabia.

Besides that, the planned re-operation of the oil pipeline connecting Kirkuk with the port of Baniyas in Syria (with relevant construction works to be undertaken by local public companies and not by international oil companies) constitutes a significant parameter in the «geopolitics of energy». To complete the geo-strategic puzzle note that China participates directly in the production of oil in Syria and Israel seems to prefer the stability and security of a regime for which it has attained a long time geopolitical familiarization than the risks emanating from the highly stochastic nature of the rebel forces.

The political turmoil in Syria started in March 2011. Following Assad’s violent and bloody repression of social uprisings, first U.S. and then E.U. imposed sanctions on Damascus. New rounds of sanctions, directed on the energy sector of Syria, were imposed in August 2011. As a result of the above sanctions the American oil companies were prohibited from taking part in projects regarding the exploration and exploitation of the energy resources of Syria and to take advantage of its position as an emerging energy transport hub in the region. U.S. worked hard in the diplomatic sphere to prevent competitors from entering the Syrian vacuum, persuading E.U. and pressing Britain to the limits to join sanctions against the Syrian regime. France, although it has historical interests and exercises a strong influence in Syria and Lebanon, appears not willing to oppose Washington plans.

Turkey, after a short period of wavering, took a clear and decisive position against Assad’s regime. Conclusively, one of the contributing factors to the Syrian crisis seems to be an escalating ‘geo-energy war’: as soon as the comparative differential geopolitical significance of energy paths and the various energy resources of the Levant Basin were clearly recognized, Syria acquired an enhanced geostrategic importance, (Karkazis, Vidakis, Baltos, 2010: 108-111). Furthermore, the upgrading of Syria as an energy hub would considerably reduce the benefits enjoyed by Washington from the

control of the Persian Gulf and at the same time would result in the reduction of the dependence of E.U. on Russian energy resources and on energy paths controlled by the U.S. The above may also explain, to some degree, the growing geopolitical understanding developed recently between U.S. and Russia on Middle East issues. If we cross-examine the above with the enormous interests of American oil companies in the Region (and their influence on governmental politics) and the long term Washington policies to isolate Iran (and also Syria in its capacity as an ally of Tehran) then we can more clearly recognize the option of rupture with the Syrian regime. Finally, as we may conclude from the following remarks Turkish geostrategic interests could be also hurt.

A fall of Assad's regime would open the door to the restoration of only the Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline (at least initially) the design of which took place in 1930 to allow for the transportation of Iraqi oil to Mediterranean ports. This restoration will be undertaken by western firms and this will lead to the entrance in Syria of western multinational oil companies (under the American auspices) and the subsequent uncontrolled exploitation of its energy resources. We stress at this point a norm (prerequisite) in the geopolitics of energy: before the great powers proceed with strategic investments in the area of hydrocarbons they try their best to secure first the long-term stability and friendliness of the geopolitical environment.

Notes

[1] We noted the Russian naval facility in Tartus, a military installation of the Russian Navy located in the port of the city of Tartus.

[2] This sector (of foreign investments) received an almost lethal blow during the '80s as a result of an embargo imposed by the West.

[3] This pipeline was never constructed.

[4] Twenty three years before the destruction of this pipeline, at the beginning of the Iraqi-Iranian war (1980-1988), the president of Syria Hafez al Assad ordered the suspension of oil flow in this pipeline. Note Hafez al Assad was the only Arab leader who supported Iran in the war against Saddam Hussein.

[5] Note that Syria is characterized by an extremely high population growth rate: in 1962 its population was only 4 million and now has reached 23 million.

[6] UPI, 20 November 2012, U.S. brushes off Iran-Iraq-Syria gas line, <http://www.upi.com/Business_News/Energy-Resources/2012/11/20/US-brushes-off-Iran-Iraq-Syria-gasline/UPI-36621353414380/>, 10.09.2013.

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RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC GEOPOLITICAL PURSUITS (The case of Syria)

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Extracts

1. The strategic geopolitical pursuits of Moscow's foreign policy

The strengthening of Russian footholds in the wider area of Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The purpose of this pursuit, is clearly the offensive containment of the American plans to establish a frontier 'bridgehead' in the Caucasus region (Georgia), and in the (under incubation) Great Kurdistan to control both the westward advance of Russians and the energy resources of the Region. Moscow's attempts to expand its influence in other parts of the world, including Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, is not something new in Russia's foreign policy. These ambitions have their roots back in the Soviet era and even earlier, close related to the challenge of securing the vast territory from anyone on the borders that was perceived to be hostile. It is worth to note that in some American maps of the Region, the Great Kurdistan extends from northeastern Syria to northwestern Iran and up to northeastern parts of Turkey (Rizus province), the latter evidently planned to form a state 'barrier' against possible Russia's plans. It also serves the further enhancement of diplomatic and economic relations with Cyprus and the continuous and decisive support of Tehran's theocratic regime and Damascus' reforming Allewite regime ([4], [5]).

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The defense of its military footholds in Syria which supervise the geo-strategic spots of Syrian Gates and Cyprus. It is strongly believed that this constitutes a 'red line' of strategic priority for Moscow (evidently fully understood by U.S., Israel and Britain but not fully by Turkey) and they are going to defend them at any cost (not excluding land forces deployment as a remote possibility). Indicative of the geo-strategic importance of Russian footholds in Syria is the declination of Russia (according to many newspaper reports) to discuss a proposal made by the government of Cyprus, offering a naval base in the island as a strong incentive for a Russian loan. Note that Moscow does not possess adequate naval forces in the Mediterranean to defend such a foothold in Cyprus. Furthermore, such a pursuit on behalf of Moscow would clash with the vital geo-strategic interests of Britain in Cyprus. In contrast with a naval base in Cyprus, in the context of a 'worst case' scenario (and under the 'red line' assumption) Moscow could easier defend its Syrian footholds by land and air forces. Furthermore, the establishment of a base in Cyprus would automatically weaken Moscow's will to defend diplomatically or/and military its footholds in Syria ([7]).

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The status of Istanbul Straits. The Istanbul Straits are of outmost importance for Moscow. It is worth to note that besides the fact that only warships smaller than 15,000 tons from countries outside the Black Sea are allowed to pass through the Straits, (a restriction which prevents the US navy operating in the Black Sea), Turkey in 1976 eased the restrictions for large Russian warships offering to Mosque an advantage over the USA. The Straits being a key element in Russian strategy, allowing both naval operations in the Atlantic and current operations in Syria, are among the most important pursuits of Russia's foreign policy ([8]).

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2. THE DECISIVENESS OF RUSSIA TO DEFEND ITS INTERESTS IN THE REGION

With the cautious enhancement of its military presence in Eastern Mediterranean. In December 2011, Moscow deployed a strong naval force there under the flagship carrier “Admiral Kuznetsov”⁷⁸. On the eve of American military intervention in Syria, Moscow cautiously but decisively escalates its naval presence in Eastern Mediterranean to a level that could not be ignored by Washington.

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NEAR EAST BULLETIN ON SYRIA (News Titles and Links)

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Turkey cautions may be too soon to expect mass refugee returns to Aleppo

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Kyiv rejects Russia's allegation of Ukrainian involvement in Syria

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/04/kyiv-rejects-russia-s-allegation-of-ukrainian-involvement-in-syria->

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Syria's al-Assad orders 50 percent raise in career soldiers' pay

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/04/syria-s-al-assad-orders-50-percent-raise-in-career-soldiers-pay>

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War monitor says death toll in Syria fighting tops 700

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/04/war-monitor-says-death-toll-in-syria-fighting-tops-700>

** 3/12/2024

Moscow says Russia, Iran, Turkey in 'close contact' over Syria conflict

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2024/12/04/moscow-says-russia-iran-turkey-in-close-contact-over-syria-conflict->

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Syria war monitor says pro-government forces repel attack in east

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/04/syria-war-monitor-says-pro-government-forces-repel-attack-in-east>

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Syrian army launches counteroffensive against armed opposition groups near Hama

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Iran says ready to study any Syrian request for troops

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Russia's UN envoy accuses Ukraine of aiding Syrian anti-government forces

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Qatar warns of military solution to Syria civil war

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Syria needs to engage in real political process, Turkey's Erdogan tells Iraq

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Syrian opposition advances close to Hama, piling pressure on al-Assad and his allies
<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/03/armed-opposition-forces-battle-syria-troops-near-key-city-of-hama-monitor>

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Israeli strike near Damascus kills Hezbollah liaison with Syrian army
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Iraqi armed group urges government to deploy troops to Syria
<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/03/iraqi-armed-group-urges-government-to-deploy-troops-to-syria->

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US-backed group fights Syrian army as reignited conflict spreads
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Syria flare-up jolts US and offers chance for Donald Trump
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At least 44 killed, 48,500 displaced in northwest Syria from Nov 26 to Dec 1: UN
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Iran foreign minister: Astana process likely to meet in Doha to discuss Syria
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WATCH: Syrian opposition forces capture Hama
<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/12/5/syrian-opposition-forces-capture-hama>

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Three US troops being evaluated for brain injuries after Syria attack: Pentagon
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Turkey's Erdogan tells UN's Guterres new phase reached in Syrian conflict, presidency says
<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/turkey-s-erdogan-tells-un-s-guterres-new-phase-reached-in-syrian-conflict-presidency-says>

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UN chief Guterres urges end to bloodshed in Syria
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Lebanese Army sends reinforcements to eastern border with Syria as clashes intensify
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Communications stopped in Syria's Aleppo due to attacks, state media says
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** 5/12/2024

Chinese embassy in Syria tells citizens to leave country

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/chinese-embassy-in-syria-tells-citizens-to-leave-country->

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Syrian air defenses down 'two hostile drones' over Damascus

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Syrian armed opposition leader urges Iraq to keep Iran-backed forces out

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Syrian opposition forces capture key city of Hama in fresh blow to al-Assad

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WATCH: Syria's evolving war shifts balance against Assad regime, allies

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Why did Syria's opposition forces choose now to attack?

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Ukraine says Syrian collapse shows Russia can't fight on two fronts

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Syrian opposition commander urges top Syrian officers to defect

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Jordan closes border crossing into Syria

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Syria's defense ministry denies report that government troops withdrew from Homs

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Israel military 'reinforcing' troops in occupied Golan amid Syria conflict

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Syrian opposition advance poses risks for US and others, former envoy says

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Syria Kurdish-led force chief says open to talks with Turkey

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Russia urges its nationals to leave Syria

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US-backed Syrian Kurds seize control of Syria's Deir Ezzor: Sources

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Erdogan hopes Syrian opposition forces will advance, but raises alarm about some fighters

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Iran aims to send missiles, drones, military advisers to Syria, senior official says

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The US sits quietly as fate of Syria's al-Assad hangs in the balance

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Up to 1.5 million people could flee Syrian escalation, UN official says

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/un-says-syria-fighting-has-displaced-280-000-since-november-27>

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Turkey confirms Syria talks with Russia and Iran

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** 6/12/2024

Syria opposition leader says goal is to 'overthrow' al-Assad

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Syria monitor says opposition fighters close in on Homs city

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** 6/12/2024

Foreign armies in Syria and how they came to be there

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Israel says struck Hezbollah 'smuggling routes' on Syria-Lebanon border

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** 6/12/2024

Strikes on key bridge linking Syria's Homs, Hama: War monitor

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/strikes-on-key-bridge-linking-syria-s-homs-hama-war-monitor>

** 6/12/2024

Syria war monitor says tens of thousands flee Homs as opposition group fighters advance

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** 3/12/2024

WATCH: Meet the Polish pro-Palestinian artist challenging taboos about Israel

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/12/5/meet-the-polish-pro-palestinian-artist-challenging-taboos-about-israel>

** 5/12/2024

WATCH: Video: People flee North Gaza after Israel's 'leave-or-die' orders

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/12/5/video-people-flee-north-gaza-after-israels-leave-or-die-orders>

** 5/12/2024

WATCH: Israel wants to continue war on Gaza, but to what end?

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-bottom-line/2024/12/5/israel-wants-to-continue-war-on-gaza-but-to-what-end>

** 5/12/2024

WATCH: Children 'incinerated' in Israeli attack on 'safe zone' in Gaza

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/12/5/children-incinerated-in-israeli-attack-on-safe-zone-in-gaza>

** 5/12/2024

Palestinians call for action to halt Israeli attacks on West Bank hospitals

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/5/palestinians-call-for-action-to-halt-israeli-attacks-on-west-bank-hospitals>

** 5/12/2024

Amnesty International accuses Israel of committing genocide in Gaza

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/5/amnesty-international-accuses-israel-of-committing-genocide-in-gaza>

** 5/12/2024

LIVE: Israel hits Gaza hospital water tanks, kills 48 Palestinians in a day

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/12/5/live-israel-kills-20-in-attack-on-al-mawasi-camp-in-gaza>

** 5/12/2024

Top US, Lebanese generals discuss progress on Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire deal

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/top-us-lebanese-generals-discuss-progress-on-hezbollah-israel-ceasefire-deal>

** 5/12/2024

Hezbollah pays over \$50 mln in cash gifts to families affected by war with Israel

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/hezbollah-pays-over-50-mln-in-cash-gifts-to-families-affected-by-war-with-israel>

** 5/12/2024

Israel FM says 'may have opportunity' for Gaza hostage deal

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/israel-fm-says-may-have-opportunity-for-gaza-hostage-deal>

** 5/12/2024

Israel army spokesman regrets remarks on bill linked to ex-Netanyahu aide

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/israel-army-spokesman-regrets-remarks-on-bill-linked-to-ex-netanyahu-aide>

** 5/12/2024

Qatar resumes Gaza mediation: Source

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/qatar-resumes-gaza-mediation-source>

** 5/12/2024

Israel calls Amnesty accusation of genocide in Gaza 'entirely false'

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/israel-calls-amnesty-accusation-of-genocide-in-gaza-entirely-false>

** 5/12/2024

US says Amnesty charge of 'genocide' by Israel 'unfounded'

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/united-states/2024/12/05/us-says-amnesty-charge-of-genocide-by-israel-unfounded>

** 5/12/2024

Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Amnesty report says

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/israel-has-committed-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza-amnesty-report-says>

** 5/12/2024

Trump's Middle East envoy in diplomatic push to reach Gaza ceasefire before inauguration

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/united-states/2024/12/05/trump-s-middle-east-envoy-in-diplomatic-push-to-reach-gaza-ceasefire-before-inauguration>

** 5/12/2024

Palestinians accuse Israeli forces of raiding West Bank hospital

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/palestinians-accuse-israeli-forces-of-raiding-west-bank-hospital>

** 5/12/2024

Iranian fighter jet crashes in the south of the country, killing both pilots

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/05/iranian-fighter-jet-crashes-in-the-south-of-the-country-killing-both-pilots>

** 5/12/2024

Who accuses Israel of committing genocide in Gaza?

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/6/who-accuses-israel-of-committing-genocide-in-gaza>

** 5/12/2024

Israel kills dozens of civilians across Gaza

<https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/12/6/israeli-attacks-kill-dozens-of-civilians-across-gaza-2>

** 5/12/2024

WATCH: Israeli forces attack and raid hospital in Gaza siege zone

<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2024/12/6/israeli-forces-attack-and-raid-hospital-in-gaza-siege-zone>

** 5/12/2024

LIVE: 29 Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza hospital

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/12/6/live-israel-kills-dozens-in-gaza-continues-to-target-southern-lebanon>

** 5/12/2024

Iran multiplying pace of uranium enrichment to near bomb grade

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/iran-multiplying-pace-of-uranium-enrichment-to-near-bomb-grade>

** 5/12/2024

Israel PM links Australia synagogue arson to govt' "anti-Israel sentiment"

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2024/12/06/israel-pm-links-australia-synagogue-arson-to-govt-anti-israel-sentiment>

** 5/12/2024

IAEA chief says Iran's enrichment to near bomb grade set to rise 'dramatically'

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/iaea-chief-says-iran-s-enrichment-to-near-bomb-grade-set-to-rise-dramatically>

** 5/12/2024

Lebanese expats rush for holiday flights post-ceasefire, face high costs and uncertainty

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/lebanese-expats-rush-for-holiday-flights-post-ceasefire-face-high-costs-and-uncertainty>

** 5/12/2024

Israeli forces storm Gaza hospital, expel some staff, displaced people, its director says

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/north-gaza-hospital-director-says-israeli-strikes-hit-facility>

** 5/12/2024

Head of US-backed Syrian Kurdish force says ISIS has taken areas in east Syria

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/head-of-us-backed-syrian-kurdish-force-says-isis-has-taken-areas-in-east-syria>

** 5/12/2024

Hezbollah sent some 'supervising forces' overnight to Syria's Homs: Sources

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/hezbollah-sent-some-supervising-forces-overnight-to-syria-s-homs-sources>

** 5/12/2024

Palestinian security forces exchange gunfire with militants in West Bank

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/12/06/palestinian-security-forces-exchange-gunfire-with-militants-in-west-bank>

DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA DURING 2024

SYRIA AT A CRITICAL CROSSROADS

Ahmad Edris, Editor, Near East Bulletin on Gaza, 8 December 2024

The Assad family has been ruling Syria since 1970, when Hafez al-Assad, an Alawite (the Alawites constitute the largest Muslim minority, approximately 10% of the country's population), took power following a military coup on November 13 of that year. His rule continued until his death in June 2000.

Subsequently, his son, Bashar al-Assad, assumed power on July 17, 2000, after a constitutional amendment allowed him to become president.

In 1982, a group within the military attempted to assassinate President Hafez al-Assad but failed. Following this, Assad's brother intervened and carried out the Hama Massacre in February 1982. The Syrian Armed Forces and Defense Brigades laid siege to the city for 27 days under Hafez al-Assad's orders to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood uprising. As a result, approximately 42,000 people were killed. This massacre, under the command of General Rifaat al-Assad, effectively ended the rebellion that began in 1976 by Sunni Islamist groups.

How did the war in Syria start?

At the end of 2010, the Arab Spring spread to Syria. Citizens began protesting against the dire living conditions and the dictatorship. Bashar al-Assad responded to these protests with violence, arrests, and torture, following the same methods used by his father in 1982.

In March 2011, protests demanding democracy broke out in the city of Daraa, inspired by similar uprisings in other countries. These demonstrations spread across Syria, with funerals of martyrs often becoming opportunities for large-scale peaceful protests.

The Syrian regime reacted with repression, gunfire, and arrests. The violence turned protesters' demands from calls for freedom into demands for the overthrow of the regime.

Gradually, defections began to occur within the regular Syrian army. Lieutenant Colonel Hussein Harmoush announced his defection, condemning the killing of unarmed civilians. He founded the "Free Officers Movement," urging other soldiers to desert and join him.

The Assad regime sought help from Russia and Iran, which provided military and political support to suppress the revolution.

Russia supported the Syrian regime politically and diplomatically by using its veto power at the UN to block international resolutions condemning the Assad regime. Simultaneously, Russia sought to test and promote its own weapons while ensuring a resolution aligned with the Syrian regime's interests.

Between 2015 and 2018, more than 63,000 Russian soldiers participated in military operations, and the Russian Air Force conducted 39,000 sorties, targeting 121,466 locations described as

"terrorist positions." These attacks resulted in the deaths of over 86,000 people, excluding civilian casualties.

Military cooperation peaked in June 2015 with the establishment of the Khmeimim Air Base, located 25 kilometers south of Latakia. Iran sent military equipment and hundreds of fighters, spending billions of dollars to support Assad. Thousands of Shia fighters, backed by Iran and Hezbollah from Lebanon, fought alongside the Syrian army. Additionally, fighters from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen joined the conflict.

The violence in Syria intensified, leading to over a million people fleeing the country. Despite the challenges, rebels managed to maintain control over some areas, which remain independent to this day. At one point, the group ISIS (Islamic State) emerged, which, according to some claims, was created by the U.S. to justify control over Syria's oil-producing regions. ISIS committed massacres and murders in the name of Islam, contributing to the global perception of Muslims as terrorists.

Rebels and Kurds, primarily in northeastern Syria, achieved military successes, supported militarily by the United States.

Airstrikes and Chemical Weapons

The regime employed heavy weapons of various kinds, including incendiary bombs, cluster munitions, Scud missiles, and mortar shells. One year after the revolution began, airstrikes were initiated using explosive barrels filled with metal fragments and explosives, dropped from helicopters. This tactic was first recorded in March 2012. In July 2012, military aircraft targeted non-military facilities, including residences, schools, and social welfare structures. These bombings caused severe damage to hospitals, medical centers, marketplaces, and residential areas, resulting in large-scale massacres. The regime also used various types of chemical weapons. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, 222 chemical attacks were documented, resulting in 1,510 deaths and injuries to over 11,000 people. The most infamous chemical massacre occurred in Ghouta on August 21, 2013, where areas in the Damascus countryside were bombarded with chemical weapons, causing the death of hundreds of civilians and injuring thousands.

The Emergence of Other Parties in the Battles

In October 2015, the formation of the "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF) was announced. This unified military force includes Arabs, Kurds, and Syrians from various factions. The SDF primarily focuses its activities in northeastern regions of Syria.

International Sanctions

The United States of America enacted a criminal law against the Syrian regime known as the "Caesar Act." The law was named after a member of the Syrian military, known by the pseudonym "Caesar," whose mission was to photograph evidence of crimes against civilians in the regime's detention centers. In 2013, Caesar defected, taking with him approximately 55,000 photographs of detainees who were tortured or killed in the regime's prisons, an act that shocked the international community.

In 2016, U.S. representatives submitted a bill aimed at halting the mass killings of the Syrian people, promoting a resolution with the regime, and holding human rights violators accountable. After discussions, Congress and the Senate approved the law in December 2019, and former

President Donald Trump signed it into law as part of the 2020 defense budget. The law came into effect in June 2020.

The Caesar Act imposes sanctions on:

1. Foreign entities involved in financial transactions with institutions linked to the Syrian government.
2. Entities providing military support to the regime.
- 3-. Militias fighting on behalf of the Syrian government.
4. Entities offering financial, technical, or informational support to the regime.
5. Organizations that enhance the production of natural gas or oil in Syria.
6. Entities supplying aircraft or aviation-related services for military purposes.
7. Individuals responsible for war crimes, such as:
 - The President of Syria.
 - The Prime Minister and Vice President.
 - Commanders of the armed forces, security, and intelligence services.
 - Senior officials, including police chiefs, commanders of the Fourth Division, the Republican Guard, and prison administrators.

Although the regime claims that the law restricts humanitarian aid, this is untrue, as the United Nations and humanitarian organizations continue to provide support to those affected.

Victims of the Syrian Revolution up to 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented:

- 230,224 civilian deaths, of which 15,272 were caused by torture.
- The disappearance and detention of 154,816 people.
- The displacement of nearly 14 million Syrians.

Control of Aleppo

After the region remained calm for four years between the two sides, the rebels detected weaknesses in the government forces. They perceived this situation as an opportunity to strike Syrian forces at a time when Russia and Iran were focused on other priorities. Consequently, they launched an operation on November 27, 2024, which is considered the largest and most complex in recent years. This operation is comparable to the one carried out by armed opposition factions in 2015 when they captured Idlib.

There are two main reasons for this action:

1. The major powers supporting the Syrian president - namely Russia and Iran - are preoccupied with other issues, such as the war in Ukraine and the situation in Lebanon.
2. Hezbollah in Lebanon, which played a decisive role in supporting Assad in the past, is no longer able to provide the same level of assistance in the current war.

Long live Freedom!

INTERPRETING LAVROV'S ASSESSMENT OF EVENTS IN SYRIA FROM HIS INTERVIEW WITH TUCKER

Andrew Korybko, 7 December 2024

<https://eestiest.com/interpreting-lavrovs-assessment-of-events-in-syria-from-his-interview-with-tucker/>

Extracts

If Putin hopes to reach a deal with Erdogan on Syria, then it'll require keeping up the pretense (however unbelievable it is to objective observers) that Turkiye no longer backs terrorists, thus accounting for Lavrov's diplomatic assessment of events there.

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Russia is keenly aware of its current military limitations in this theater and the possibility of overstretching its Aerospace Forces by suddenly redirecting them away to Syria from Ukraine precisely at the moment when it must achieve a breakthrough before Trump returns to office. That's why Russia appears to be going all in on a political solution instead of a military one.

THIS WEEKEND'S ASTANA SUMMIT IS LIKELY THE LAST CHANCE FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION IN SYRIA

Andrew Korybko, 6 December 2024

<https://eestiest.com/this-weekends-astana-summit-is-likely-the-last-chance-for-a-political-solution-in-syria/>

Extracts

Despite Russia's best diplomatic efforts, Assad might still refuse whatever deal he's presented just like he refused to make any progress on promulgating even part of the draft constitution. Unlike then, however, he can no longer rely on Iran to back him up like before if everything continues worsening after his next potential refusal. If he still declines to cut a deal, then Russia might punish him by not letting him to live out the rest of his days in Moscow if he's overthrown, let alone evacuate him if the need arises.

WHY ASSAD'S REGIME IS COLLAPSING SO QUICKLY

Charles Lister, Foreign Policy, December 5, 2024

https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/12/05/syria-assad-regime-collapsing-quickly/?utm_content=gifting&tpcc=gifting_article&gifting_article=c3lyaWEtYXNzYWQtcnVnaW1lLWNvbGxhcHNpbmctcXVpY2tseQ==&pid=PNINDdWCfrkgws3

Extracts

Over the past week, the future of Bashar al-Assad's regime has been placed squarely into question.

A coalition of armed opposition factions has gone on the offensive in northern Syria, capturing some 250 cities, towns, and villages and more than doubling the territory under its control. Syria's second-largest city of Aleppo was captured in 24 hours, as Syrian regime front lines collapsed one after the other. After nearly five years of territorial lines of control being frozen across the country, these are dramatic, game-changing developments.

Yet they should not entirely be a surprise. Not only had Assad never truly "won" his country's civil war, but his rule has also been weakening for some time. His position is more vulnerable than ever before.

THE FIVE REASONS WHY SYRIA WAS CAUGHT BY SURPRISE

Andrew Korybko, 30 November 2024

<https://eestiest.com/the-five-reasons-why-syria-was-caught-by-surprise/>

Extracts

Complacency & Corruption

The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) rested on its laurels because it took the Russian-brokered ceasefire for granted, after which the country's infamous corruption kicked in to degrade its capabilities. There's no excuse for why even basic drones weren't used for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) to detect the buildup that preceded this advance. A large part of why the SAA didn't do anything is likely because it assumed that its Russian and Iranian allies would shoulder these responsibilities for them.

.....

The disaster in Aleppo was avoidable and is just as bad as it looks. It's not part of a "5D chess master plan" to "trap the terrorists in a cauldron" like some members of the Alt-Media Community have implied or claimed. Observers should reject the "insight" shared by those who already discredited themselves with their fantastical takes on the SMO and the West Asian Wars. The "politically inconvenient" truth is that Syria was caught by surprise, the SAA is on the backfoot, and the worst might be yet to come.

THE TERRORIST OFFENSIVE IN ALEPPO IS MEANT TO DELIVER A COUP DE GRACE TO SYRIA

Andrew Korybko, 28 November 2024

<https://eestiest.com/the-islamist-offensive-in-aleppo-is-meant-to-deliver-a-coup-de-grace-to-syria/>

Russia's military presence in Syria might also be unaffected since neither Israel nor the US minds it. In fact, Putin might even appreciate Netanyahu teaching Erdogan a lesson since the Turkish leader's proxy offensive in Syria risks reversing Russia's anti-terrorist progress there and thus harming its reputation. Moreover, Trump might also appreciate Netanyahu doing the same to Erdogan, which Tulsi would applaud as well if she's confirmed as DNI. Erdogan might thus ultimately regret approving this offensive.

In the event that he loses Aleppo and his allies can't help him liberate it again, such as if Russia's Aerospace Forces are still focused on the special operation while Iran's might have been irreparably weakened by the latest West Asian Wars, then he might finally consider it. Everything will therefore depend on whether HTS is stopped outside of Aleppo; the outcome of any possible battle for that city; and how desperate Assad becomes if he loses control over it and the terrorists advance on Damascus.

DON'T LEAVE SYRIA. THE MISSION IS FAR FROM OVER

Charles Lister, Middle East Institute (MEI), November 22, 2024

<https://mei.edu/blog/dont-leave-syria-mission-far-over>

Extracts

If Hamas's brutal assault on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, taught us one thing, it was that abandoning unresolved crises to fester only ever leads to sudden and debilitating eruptions of violence. Syria and the ISIS challenge is no different. It is not risk free; but in nine years, the US military has lost just 10 soldiers in combat in Syria — and none since February 2022.

While the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq required hundreds of thousands of troops and cost as much as \$100 billion per year each, the counter-ISIS mission in Syria costs a mere fraction of that — at most 2%. In fact, after taking everything into account, Syria offers a case study of extraordinary success achieved at record low levels of expense and risk. Such a light footprint approach, in close partnership with effective, loyal, and sustainable local partners, should be acknowledged by

policymakers as the ideal model for dealing with the security challenges of the future. But importantly, the mission in Syria is far from over.

To abandon the mission now would bring no meaningful benefit to the US, but it would swiftly and significantly empower America's adversaries, like ISIS, Iran, Russia, and Assad's regime.

ASSAD AND HEZBOLLAH HUNKER DOWN IN SYRIA

November 15, 2024

Charles Lister, Middle East Institute (MEI), November 15, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/assad-and-hezbollah-hunker-down-syria>

Sections

Assad — down but not out

Syria remains a haven for Hezbollah

Extracts

Amid all of this, Syria has received very little attention, despite its central role in Iran's regional agenda as its main state ally in the Arab world. For decades, Iran's revolutionary drive to expel the US and Israel from the Middle East ran through Damascus. And yet, despite being at the heart of the so-called "Axis of Resistance," Bashar al-Assad has clearly sought to keep the Syrian state out of the maelstrom. This has not been an act of benevolence, as some might suggest, but rather an act of self-preservation. After more than 13 years of civil conflict, Assad's regime is arguably weaker and more vulnerable than ever before — with a broken economy, a destroyed infrastructure, a divided nation, a security apparatus ruled by organized crime, and no light at the end of the tunnel.

EARLY RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION IN REGIME-CONTROLLED AREAS OF SYRIA: AN ASSESSMENT

Munqeth Othman Agha, Muhannad al-Rish, Middle East Institute (MEI), November 1, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/early-recovery-and-rehabilitation-regime-controlled-areas-syria-assessment>

Extracts

Since the announcement of the UN-led Early Recovery Trust Fund in March 2024, early recovery has emerged as a contentious topic among donors, policymakers, and international organizations. Central to this debate are the definition of "early recovery," the fund allocation mechanism, and the implications for Syria's political transition. Concerns have emerged that early recovery could serve as a way to bypass restrictions on reconstruction imposed on the Syrian regime. With normalization efforts gaining momentum in recent years, particularly from Gulf states and some European countries, fears have intensified that early recovery could further undermine the political viability of the reconstruction card as an avenue for achieving a meaningful political transition in Syria.

In parallel to this political debate, this study examines the capacity of regime-controlled areas to effectively engage in early recovery and rehabilitation. It explores the political, legal, and economic frameworks the Syrian regime uses, with a particular focus on return and recovery activities, aiming to draw conclusions about the regime's broader vision for nationwide reconstruction. Damascus is used as the primary case study due to the scale of its destruction and the variety of reconstruction projects undertaken in recent years.

INSIDE DAMASCUS'S RECONSTRUCTION LAB: NAVIGATING THE FRAMEWORK OF RETURN AND RECOVERY

Munqeth Othman Agha, Muhannad al-Rish, Middle East Institute (MEI), October 31, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/Agha%2C%20Al-Rish%20-%20Inside%20Damascus's%20Reconstruction%20Lab.pdf>

Extracts: Introduction

In October 2022, Syrian Prime Minister Hussain Arnous inaugurated the commencement of two commercial tourist projects in Damascus: 1 Nirvana Complex, a luxury commercial and tourist development in the Hijaz area (at the site of a cherished historic building that was demolished²), and Victoria Hotel, a five-star accommodation in central Damascus. These projects are in close proximity to Basilia City and Marota City, high-end urban development complexes constructed on lands forcibly depopulated during the conflict.³ The announcement of luxury housing schemes in a country devastated by conflict and within a city suffering from massive destruction and housing shortages encapsulates the contradictions of the regime's policy for reconstruction and early recovery not only in Damascus but in the whole country. This policy can be summarized as minimizing return and rehabilitation activities in areas where the regime plans to implement its pre-conflict urban development plans while concentrating its resources in "economically profitable" sectors and locations. This research paper aims to unravel this policy, delving into its legal, political, and security foundations, drawing key lessons about the post-conflict landscape in Damascus.

Damascus was selected as a primary case study due to the city's extensive destruction and the scale and diversity of projects implemented in recent years. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, the city has experienced numerous rounds of displacement, destruction, return, and reconstruction. Our objective is to engage with the various facets of post-conflict policies instituted by the regime since its recapture of Damascus in 2018. Given the political, security, and economic significance of the city, an in-depth analysis of Damascus will provide insights

The paper is structured into four sections. The first section provides a historical overview of the roots of the urban crisis in Damascus, followed by an examination of the patterns of destruction and displacement during the conflict. The subsequent section delves into the legal, political, and security frameworks governing several aspects of early recovery and reconstruction efforts, such as return, debris removal, housing rehabilitation, and regulatory plans. The projects related to early recovery that have been implemented by the Damascus Governorate Council (DGC) will be quantitatively analyzed in the third section to scrutinize the council's geographic and sectoral priorities. The final section will investigate two case studies, namely southern Damascus and the Qabun area, to assess the current applications of return and rehabilitation. The researchers conducted 10 interviews with current residents or displaced persons from Damascus between May and December 2023. Data on early recovery projects were gathered from the Facebook pages of Damascus and Rural Damascus governorate councils and triangulated with secondary data from local Facebook pages that provide regular updates on the situation on the ground.

ASSAD'S ECONOMIC FRAGILITY EXPOSED BY ISRAEL'S WAR ON LEBANON

Haid Haid, Middle East Institute (MEI), October 30, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/assads-economic-fragility-exposed-israels-war-lebanon>

Extracts: Impact on the regime

Despite the potential for unrest, significant destabilization of the regime in the short term appears unlikely. The government has consistently shown a readiness to use force to suppress dissent, as demonstrated by its swift crackdowns on localized protests in the past. For instance, following the eruption of protests in Sweida last year, the regime swiftly targeted other areas showing signs of unrest to contain the spread of demonstrations. Within days, the regime reportedly made over 100 arrests in Aleppo and 70 in coastal areas, and it imposed blockades on former rebel-held zones in Aleppo and rural Damascus.

The regime's extensive security apparatus remains deeply entrenched, and any emerging unrest would likely face immediate and potentially harsh repression. However, while force can temporarily contain dissent, it does not address the root causes of economic suffering. Over-reliance on

repression could ultimately backfire, as seen during the 2011 uprising, especially if public anger reaches a tipping point where fear no longer outweighs desperation.

In the longer term, the regime's inability to mitigate the economic repercussions of the ongoing conflict in Lebanon — particularly given the lack of a foreseeable resolution — poses a significant threat to its stability. Continued deterioration in living conditions could strain the loyalty of key supporters, deepen rifts within the regime's inner circle, and expose cracks in its authority, potentially setting the stage for deeper socio-political turmoil.

ISIS'S ENDURING THREAT IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Middle East Institute (MEI), August 21, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/multimedia/podcast/isiss-enduring-threat-syria-and-iraq>

On this week's episode, Director of MEI's Syria and Countering Terrorism and Extremism Programs Charles Lister speaks with MEI Editor-in-Chief Alistair Taylor on the resurgence of the Islamic State, or ISIS, in Syria and Iraq. This episode is the first in a several-part series looking at where the terrorist group stands today and its international footprint 10 years on from the founding of the 87-country Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

THE IMPACT OF TURKISH-SYRIAN NORMALIZATION ON THE SDF

Samer al-Ahmed, Middle East Institute (MEI), August 2, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/impact-turkish-syrian-normalization-sdf>

Extracts: Conclusion

The future of the SDF and the self-administration in northeastern Syria largely depends on the Turkish-Syrian normalization path and associated regional and international developments. Given the current complexities and challenges, the SDF needs to adopt flexible strategies to adapt to the various possible scenarios. The SDF's relationship with international powers, particularly the United States, and its ability to address internal issues, such as relations with local tribes and improvements to governance, remain crucial factors in maintaining the region's stability and its ability to face future challenges.

ANOTHER UPRISING HAS STARTED IN SYRIA

Charles Lister, Foreign Policy, July 19, 2024

https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/07/18/syria-uprising-assad-daraa-suwayda/?utm_content=gifting&tpcc=gifting_article&gifting_article=c3lyaWEtdXByaXNpbmctYXNzYWQtZGFyYWVtc3V3YXlkYQ==&pid=PNINDdWCfrkgws3

Extracts

Six years ago, the Syrian regime conquered the southern province of Daraa, popularly known by millions of Syrians as the “cradle of the revolution.” That military victory represented a pivotal moment for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. After all, it was the last time the regime captured a sizable swath of opposition territory, and in doing so in July 2018, its impunity was laid bare for all the world to see. On paper, Daraa had been designated a “de-escalation zone” after months of intensive international diplomacy in which the United States had played a central role.

Despite facing a regime so notorious for stopping short of nothing to eradicate opposition, the people of southern Syria appear to have had enough. From Suwayda's nearly year-long popular uprising to the recent trend for local fighters to directly challenge regime abuses and security policy, this does not look anything like a resolved crisis, but rather an evolving and potentially escalating one, once again.

CENTCOM says ISIS is reconstituting in Syria and Iraq, but the reality is even worse

Charles Lister, Middle East Institute (MEI), July 17, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/centcom-says-isis-reconstituting-syria-and-iraq-reality-even-worse>

Extracts

ISIS attacks in Syria this year have also involved greater numbers of fighters operating in the open for more prolonged periods of time; this suggests a far greater willingness to potentially lose personnel in battle and implies recruitment is no longer a problem. ISIS attacks are also increasingly infiltrating urban areas and striking more strategic targets, like oil and gas facilities and military checkpoints. The group's "shadow governance" is also back, with a well-coordinated extortion network again widespread and ISIS militants issuing bespoke "taxation" invoices to local business and enforcing commercial trucking customs duties on main roads.

ISIS's roots date as far back as the late 1980s, and the group's "state" was first established in 2006. The group has existed for far longer without territory under its control than it has with it. It is an inherently patient terrorist adversary, with a well-established track record of recovery and resurgence after suffering crippling territorial defeats. The ISIS surge in 2024 has occurred in both SDF- and regime-held regions of Syria, making for a reality we have not seen since 2017; and when paired with the qualitative spike in its activities, big red alarm bells should be ringing not just in CENTCOM headquarters but also in the White House. If this is not tackled swiftly, we risk watching a familiar story play out all over again in the coming months and years.

SYRIAN ARMED GROUPS DIVIDED OVER TURKEY-SYRIA NORMALIZATION PUSH

Bilal Samir, Middle East Institute (MEI), July 11, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/syrian-armed-groups-divided-over-turkey-syria-normalization-push>
<https://www.mei.edu/publications/syrian-armed-groups-divided-over-turkey-syria-normalization-push>

Conclusions

In conclusion, the protests in northern Syria highlight the transnational impact of the Syrian conflict. They also underscore the potential repercussions of events within Turkey on the political and security dynamics in northern Syria, and vice versa. Recent developments reveal that residents in Turkish-controlled areas of northern Syria are prepared to engage in an existential struggle if Ankara chooses to pursue normalization with the Assad regime. Furthermore, the existing divide among armed Syrian factions and their varying levels of compliance with Turkish directives raise questions about Turkey's ability to control these groups in future confrontations, restructure them, and remove dissenting members and leaders.

CROSSROADS IN IDLIB: HTS NAVIGATING INTERNAL DIVISIONS AMID POPULAR DISCONTENT

Orwa Ajjoub, Middle East Institute (MEI), May 13, 2024

<https://mei.edu/blog/dont-leave-syria-mission-far-over>

Extracts: Looking ahead

Only time will tell the true identity of al-Qahtani's killer. His killing, however, may lead to significant internal turmoil within HTS. Should HTS fail to convincingly dissociate itself from the assassination, there is a possibility that al-Qahtani's followers, especially those from the eastern region, might defect. This could undermine the group's internal cohesion and threaten its unity. Nevertheless, the HTS leadership has established strong relationships with local tribal figures, including members of its Shura Council, like Dr. Mazhar Luise from the eastern region, which may mitigate the impact of al-Qahtani's death. Al-Qahtani's absence could also have operational

repercussions as well. Without him, HTS might struggle to counter threats effectively, potentially leading to an increase in activities by rival groups in the region, particularly IS. The assassination has also been perceived differently by those within the group, with some believing it was a clear message from the HTS leadership to those who challenge its authority, leading to a sense of insecurity within the group's inner circle.

Recent events present a challenging test for HTS, revealing its internal discord and lack of institutional depth, and exposing its vulnerabilities. Stabilizing the situation will require the leadership to take strategic measures to recalibrate the power dynamics among its competing factions and to address local community demands. While HTS's handling of the protests has so far been relatively restrained, with no fatalities reported, the escalating dissatisfaction in Idlib demands substantive actions from the leadership that go beyond mere superficial adjustments. Fulfilling some community demands would be a feasible option, while other potential steps, such as al-Jolani stepping down, remain highly unlikely. The future of the group, and the region, hinges on HTS's management of internal conflicts and its responsiveness to the needs of the local population.

SYRIANS TURN TO STREET JUSTICE TO FREE RELATIVES FROM ASSAD'S PRISONS

Haid Haid, Middle East Institute (MEI), May 8, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/syrians-turn-street-justice-free-relatives-assads-prisons>

Extracts

The persistence of state-sponsored detention and extortion schemes and the absence of an independent judicial system to hold military and security forces accountable suggest that the practice of kidnapping regime officers for self-protection is likely to persist for the foreseeable future. This is primarily because these actions have proven successful in securing the prompt release of detainees from the regime without eliciting any retaliatory response.

In simple terms, while the expansion of Assad's territorial control in recent years may have enhanced the power trajectory of his armed forces, it has failed to increase the legitimacy of his regime, even in the eyes of those who live under its rule.

SPOTLIGHT ON US SYRIA POLICY

Middle East Institute (MEI), February 4, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/multimedia/podcast/spotlight-us-syria-policy>

On this week's episode, Director of MEI's Syria and Countering Terrorism & Extremism Programs Charles Lister and MEI Editor-In-Chief Alistair Taylor talk about US policy toward Syria. The deadly Jan. 28 drone attack on a US military outpost in northeastern Jordan, near the borders with Syria and Iraq, has drawn renewed attention to the US military presence in the area. This comes against a backdrop of regional conflict and escalation.

GROWING UNREST IN SYRIA'S SUWAYDA AS JORDANIAN AIRSTRIKES AND CIVILIAN DEATHS INCREASE

Mohammed Hassan, Middle East Institute (MEI), February 1, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/growing-unrest-syrias-suwayda-jordanian-airstrikes-and-civilian-deaths-increase>

Extracts: Syrian regime's reaction

Over the past several months, the Syrian government has remained silent about the Jordanian airstrikes. However, on Jan. 23, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing its "deep regret" over the airstrikes carried out by the Jordanian Air Force, adding that "such operations inside Syrian territory are unjustifiable." The statement, published by the Syrian Arab News Agency, claimed that the Jordanian airstrikes had resulted in the death of "many civilians,

including women and children,” adding that, “since 2011, Syria has suffered from an influx of tens of thousands of terrorists and the transfer of massive quantities of weapons originating from neighboring countries, including Jordan.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also stressed that the escalation in recent months is in contravention of agreements reached between the two countries on issues including drug trafficking, reiterated Syria’s “commitment to fight terrorism ... [and] illicit drug trafficking and smuggling activities,” and noted that its efforts to reach out to the Jordanian government on issues like improving border security have “yet to receive a response.” Given the well-documented reports of the Syrian regime’s involvement in drug trafficking and smuggling activities in southern Syria, Damascus may find itself waiting a long time yet.

LOCALS FIGHT THEIR OWN WAR ON DRUGS IN SYRIA’S DARAA PROVINCE

Haid Haid, Middle East Institute (MEI), January 9, 2024

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/locals-fight-their-own-war-drugs-syrias-daraa-province>

Operationally, two former opposition fighters indicated that the anti-drug vigilantes largely function in organized groups, enhancing their ability to effectively gather information and carry out targeted actions while minimizing risks. They also seem to be geographically organized,

Similarly, affiliates of ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which maintain a covert presence in Daraa, seem to be involved in targeting drug traffickers as well. For instance, a community leader pointed out that a drug dealer named Fayez al-Radi was assassinated in March 2023 by individuals linked to HTS. While ISIS seems to only target those who do not pay it for protection, HTS appears to be using those attacks to gain community support.

Despite the surge in targeted assassinations, they are unlikely to eradicate the pervasive drug-related activities in southern Syria. The power and profit afforded by Daraa’s drug trade have made traffickers heedless of the threats, particularly those posed by local communities. Armed and confident, they continue their illicit trade, unfazed by the risks involved. In this context, these assassinations will likely only add another layer of complexity, further fueling the ongoing violence in an already fragile and unstable region.

APPENDIX 1**Center of Strategic Studies: Bulletins and Related Bibliography****IRAN**

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384227283_NEAR_EAST_BULLETIN_ON_EGYPT_-_September_2024

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361606575_THE_CONFLICT_IN_UKRAINE_AND_ITS_EFFECTS_ON_FOOD_SECURITY_IN_EGYPT

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