

“Greater Israel” Project and Balkanization of Syria

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Abstract: Oded Yinon, the former senior official with the Israeli Foreign Ministry and journalist for the Jerusalem Post published a book in 1982 which is called; “A Strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties” also known as the Yinon Plan. It is an Israeli strategic plan to ensure Israeli regional superiority through the balkanization of the surrounding Arab states into smaller and weaker states.

Yinon Plan called for the “dissolution” of “the entire Arab world including Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula.” Each country was to be made to “fall apart along sectarian and ethnic lines,” after which each resulting fragment would be “hostile” to its “neighbours.”

Later, plans to balkanize Syria, Iraq and other Middle Eastern states were laid out by former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in a 2006 trip to Tel Aviv. It was part of the so called “Project for a New Middle East”. This was a carbon copy of the Yinon Plan drawn up by Israel in 1982.

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry called for Syria to be partitioned saying it was “Plan B” if negotiations failed. But in reality this was always plan A, although officially Plan A was “Assad Must Go”. Then NATO planned on shifting narratives from, ‘evil dictator must be stopped’ to “we must protect the minorities”.

As it is mentioned before plans to balkanize Syria originates from the Yinon Plan as it aimed at dismembering the Syrian state in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure, into several states. Quite simply, divide and conquer is the plan. When viewed in the current context, the war on Iraq, the 2006 war on Lebanon, the 2011 war on Libya, the ongoing war on Syria, must be understood in relation to the “Greater Israel” (Eretz Israel HaShlema) project.

The aim of this paper is to explain the process of weakening and eventually Balkanizing Syria into sectarian mini-states or propel one side or the other to victory as part of an Israeli expansionist project.

Keywords: Balkanization, Syria, Iran, Israel’s Defence, New Middle East Project,

Historical Background

This year marks the centenary of the Sykes-Picot agreement, where Britain and France secretly split up the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire between themselves after World War I. Great Britain and France transformed what had been relatively quiet provinces of the Ottoman Empire into some of the least stable and internationally explosive states in the world. As a consequence, the First World War agreements are at the very heart of the current conflicts and politics in the Middle East. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the region was divided in accordance with the political decisions of the colonial powers which in effect forced people to conform to the groupings of the established borders. The colonial powers drew the boundaries of the Middle Eastern states with no consideration to the ethnic groupings which existed at the time. The colonial powers went about applying policies which reinforced their own political goals, while at the same time

repressing nationalist movements. A major criticism of the Sykes Picot Agreement is that the lines were drawn without any consideration to the ethnic make-up of the entire region. This can be seen in the case of the Kurdish people in the region as they are separated across Syria, Iraq and Turkey. This resulted in the formation of states with multiple identities, which is relevant to some of the internal conflicts which occur within countries of the Middle East. (Sharkawy, 2016)

Syria, a country in the heart of the Middle East, has a rich history. A country that has influenced other states in the region, and has often played an important role in international affairs. Syria had been under the ultimate authority of the Ottoman administration for more than 400 years. When the Allied powers advanced into Syria, the political divisions of the country followed the lines of the provincial administrative divisions of the Ottoman Empire. Syria did not have a definite territorial border. "Syria" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a geographic entity,

known at various times as "Greater Syria," "Geographical Syria" or "Natural Syria." Geographical Syria consisted of a number of Ottoman vilayets (administrative divisions). The region was delimited by Aqaba and Sinai on the south, the Taurus Mountains on the north, the Syrian Desert on the east, and the Mediterranean Sea on the west — currently consisting of Jordan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. After the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, new national identities, citizenship and social class came to coexist with, or challenge and even replace, the identities of clan, tribe and religion. (Fildis, 2011) The establishment of the French mandate in Syria was contingent upon weakening Arab nationalism. Syria should be divided into segments to block nationalist sentiment and action. In 1920, France carved out a series of separate political units, the existence of which was designed to obstruct the progress of the Syrian national identity. They created the two separate states of Aleppo and Damascus, which included the districts of Homs and Hama, the two next-largest urban centers in the mandate. Both of these states were ruled by a local governor supported by a French adviser. In a further effort at political fragmentation, France stressed the distinctiveness of Syria's two regionally compact minority groups, the Alawites and the Druze. In 1922, the Jabal al-Druze region, which was located in an area of Druze concentration south of Damascus, was proclaimed a separate unit under French protection, with its own governor and elected congress. The mountain district behind Latakia, with its large Alawite population, became a special administrative regime under heavy French protection and was proclaimed a separate state.(Fildis, 2011) Through this administrative structure, France encouraged separatism and the particularism of religious and ethnic minorities.

During much of the Mandate era, France's divide-and-rule strategy helped to define the extent of the nationalist movement and prevent it from infecting minority-inhabited areas. The French also cut the ties between the urban nationalist opposition and the peripheral regions. Due to this strategy, the Syrian nationalist movement encountered great difficulty in expanding its activities beyond Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Homs. The French administration consciously neglected to train an efficient and dedicated administrative elite and quietly aggravated relations between the Sunni Arab majority and minorities. The numerous divisions and re-

divisions of Syria during the mandate obstructed the development of such an elite. When the last French troops withdrew in April 1946, one of the greatest obstacles to political integration after independence was regionalism. Most nationalist leaders failed to transcend their narrow town-based ideologies and did not share a broad vision of the future. Political life in Syria was characterized by chaotic rivalries within the political elite itself, in single towns or between leaders in rival towns, or between the urban-nationalist elite and the rural-based leadership of the compact minorities. The Alawites and Druze had enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy during the French mandate. Following independence in 1946, the Syrian nationalist leadership had the tremendous task of integrating the compact minorities (Alawites, and Druzes) and the scattered minorities (such as Kurds, Circassians and Armenians). The process of political radicalization was initiated during the era of the French mandate, the legacy of which was almost a guarantee of Syria's political instability (Fildis, 2012).

The New Middle East

The roots of the Syrian civil war go back years before fighting began in 2011. The current hostilities in Syria have exposed historical weaknesses in the state's cohesion and sense of national identity, and exacerbated sectarian divisions among the people, which threaten the stability of the state. Syria today, is torn by a major civil war and apparently without the prospect of peaceful solution. This civil war is an offshoot of the Arab Spring, the widespread protests which began in Tunisia 2010 and spread across the region. The term Arab Spring, which first entered the discourse in 2012, covers all social unrest leading to protests and revolutions in the Middle East in this time. In Syria there are many different religious communities and the dynamics between these communities are determined by how these groups react and behave with one another.

The following are important excerpts and passages from former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's book, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geo-strategic Imperatives*, It was written at the middle of the unipolar moment in 1997. The Eurasian-wide plan of strategic destabilization and state fracturing owes its genesis to Brzezinski and

his Eurasian Balkans concept. "In Europe, the Word "Balkans" conjures up images of ethnic conflicts and great-power regional rivalries. Eurasia, too, has its "Balkans," but the Eurasian Balkans are much larger, more populated, even more religiously and ethnically heterogeneous. The strategic 'Balkanizing' of societies across the Eurasian landmass is a pivotal means of destabilizing the entire continent. If taken to its logical end, it is envisioned to create a tidal wave of ethnic, religious, and political anarchy that can crash into and dismember the diverse civilizations of Russia, China, and Iran. Brzezinski believed that the instigation of chaotic conflicts in the North African-to-Central Asian space could preempt the consolidation of a grand Eurasian alliance between Russia, China, and Iran. The US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and their chaotic aftermath can be seen as following the philosophic dictates of this principle. The US has also historically undertaken regime change operations as a method of advancing continental destabilization and pushing Western power deeper into Eurasia (Korybko, 2014). Brzezinski also states that Turkey and Iran, both of them much more politically and economically viable, both active contestants for regional influence within the Eurasian Balkans, and thus both significant geo-strategic players in the region. At the same time, both are potentially vulnerable to internal ethnic conflicts. If either or both of them were to be destabilized, the internal problems of the region would become unmanageable, while efforts to restrain regional domination by Russia could even become futile" (Brzezinski, 1997, pp. 126-130).

In 2007, Condoleezza Rice who succeeded Brzezinski after a hiatus of two decades took this initiative forward and outlined an even more aggressive blueprint for an Anglo-American-Israeli initiative. This envisaged the creation of an arc of instability extending from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and through Pakistan extending to Afghanistan. Advocating a grand strategy of divide and control, this set the stage for unleashing what has been termed as constrictive chaos. And to a great extent, it is this chaos that has been engineered thus far, through the promotion of terror outfits and by providing material support to both state and non-state actors that has torn the region apart, (Cheema, 2017, p.38).

The term "New Middle East" was introduced to the world in June 2006 in Tel Aviv by U.S.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in replacement of the older and more imposing term, the "Greater Middle East." This shift in foreign policy phraseology coincided with the inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Terminal in the Eastern Mediterranean. The term and conceptualization of the "New Middle East," was subsequently heralded by the U.S. Secretary of State and the Israeli Prime Minister at the height of the Anglo-American sponsored Israeli siege of Lebanon. Ex-Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert and Secretary Rice had informed the international media that a project for a "New Middle East" was being launched from Lebanon. This announcement was a confirmation of an Anglo-American-Israeli "military roadmap" in the Middle East. This project, which has been in the planning stages for several years, consists in creating an arc of instability, chaos, and violence extending from Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria to Iraq, the Persian Gulf, Iran, and the borders of NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan.

The "New Middle East" project was introduced publicly by Washington and Tel Aviv with the expectation that Lebanon would be the pressure point for realigning the whole Middle East and thereby unleashing the forces of "constructive chaos." This "constructive chaos" –which generates conditions of violence and warfare throughout the region– would in turn be used so that the United States, Britain, and Israel could redraw the map of the Middle East in accordance with their geo-strategic needs and objectives. The concept of a redrawn Middle East has been presented as a "humanitarian" and "righteous" arrangement that would benefit the people(s) of the Middle East and its peripheral regions. Many of the problems affecting the contemporary Middle East are the result of the deliberate aggravation of pre-existing regional tensions. Sectarian division, ethnic tension and internal violence have been traditionally exploited by the United States and Britain in the Middle East. The redrawing and partition of the Middle East from the Eastern Mediterranean shores of Lebanon and Syria to Anatolia, Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and the Iranian Plateau responds to broad economic, strategic and military objectives, which are part of a longstanding Anglo-American and Israeli agenda in the region. A wider war in the Middle East could result in redrawn borders that are strategically advantageous to Anglo-American interests and Israel (Nazemroaya, 2016).

Dividing Middle Easterners along ethno-religious lines has a deeply troubled history. The unfolding situations in Iraq and Libya have only grown to show that intervention aimed at regime change rarely leads to positive results and even empowering more radical forces to take over the country. As countries interested in protecting their own interests consider carving up Syria, the history of partition in the region highlights the problem with dividing people along ethno-religious lines. There's little reason to believe similar 'last-ditch' plans for Syria would be any different. So it is noteworthy that Israel is endorsing its Plan B for Syria just when its enemies are making it plain that Plan A "Assad Must Go" is not happening any time soon. John Kerry, the former US secretary of state, has warned that if the ceasefire fails, the US might have to consider a Plan B—namely a partition of Syria. Israel has expressed similar doubts that the ceasefire will hold. In general, Israel ideally prefers regime changes that result in the installation of stable puppets. That is Plan A. But Plan B is to Balkanize Syria. Better to divide and conquer than to countenance a "rogue" (independent) neighbour (Sanchez, 2016).

Greater Israel Project and its Defence

Former defence minister of Israel Moshe Ya'alon suggested that Syria is "going to face chronic instability for a very, very long period of time" that could result in a number of enclaves, such as "Alawistan," "Syrian Kurdistan," "Syrian Druzistan," and so on. Ram Ben-Barak, director-general of Israel's Intelligence Ministry, went as far as to describe partition as "the only possible solution." (Quartz, 2016) I would personally argue that much of the hatred we have seen rise in the MENA – Middle East and Northern Africa, over the past decades, stem from Western powers' desire to fragment, divide and segregate to better manipulate nations, and play communities against each other. This grand Balkanization of the Middle East the Yinon Plan laid out in the 1980s was not just another political exercise

In 1982, Oded Yinon, the former senior official with the Israeli Foreign Ministry famously wrote in his book that every Arab conflict is in Israel's interests. As he continues he was specific on his wish list for Syria:

"The dissolution of Syria and Iraq later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas such as in Lebanon is Israel's primary target on the eastern front in the long run, while the dissolution of the military power of those states serves as the primary short term target.

"Syria will fall apart, in accordance with its ethnic and religious structure into several states...so that there will be a Shiite Allawi state along its coast, a Sunni state in the Aleppo area, another Sunni state in Damascus hostile to its northern neighbour, and the Druzes, who will set up a state, maybe even in our Golan and certainly in the Hauran and in northern Jordan. (...) This state of affairs will be the guarantee for peace and security in the area in the long run, and that aim is already within our reach today" (Yinon, 1982).

This is an Israeli strategic plan to ensure Israeli regional superiority through the Balkanization of the surrounding Arab states into smaller and weaker states, it also known as the Yinon Plan. The biggest winner from Syria's Balkanization would of course be Israel. Interviewed February 2016 in Davos, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Jerusalem Post of his "doubts" that "a unitary Syrian state can ever re-emerge. "I wish it could happen, but I'm not sure you could put Humpty Dumpty back together again," he said. "I'd say the best result you might be able to get is a benign balkanization, benign cantonization in Syria. That's as good as you're going to get." (Heard, 2016) Carving up Syria into bite-sized semi-autonomous sectarian enclaves is under discussion which would be yet another mistake among the multitude negatively impacting Syria throughout its recent history.

As British writer Ben Judah argues, "Israel welcomes chaos on its borders" because it is less threatened by "an ethnic patchwork" of enclaves inhabited by homogenous groups (Druze, Kurds, Shi'a, and Sunnis) than by the militarized states created by the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement (Judah, 2015).

At a June 19 2015 event at the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger touched upon an alarming new refrain in western discourse on Middle East outcomes; a third strategy, if all else fails, of redrawn borders along sectarian, ethnic, tribal or national lines that will shrink the political/military reach of key Arab states and enable the west to reassert its rapidly-

diminishing control over the region. This is what Kissinger says about Syria and Iraq:

“There are three possible outcomes in Syria. An Assad victory. A Sunni victory. Or an outcome in which the various nationalities agree to co-exist together but in more or less autonomous regions, so that they can’t oppress each other. That’s the outcome I would prefer to see. But that’s not the popular view...First of all, Syria is not a historic state. It was created in its present shape in 1920, and it was given that shape in order to facilitate the control of the country by France, which happened to be after UN mandate...The neighbouring country Iraq was also given an odd shape, that was to facilitate control by England. And the shape of both of the countries was designed to make it hard for either of them to dominate the region” (Narwani, 2015).

As he understood that the key to dismembering a nation was attacking its national identity. This entails attacking the history from which this identity is based. At Michigan University Kissinger stated that he would like to see Syria Balkanized, asserting that Syria is not a historic state and is nothing but an invention of the Sykes-Picot agreement in the 1920’s. Interestingly, Kissinger is using the same narrative as ISIS, who also claim that Syria is a colonial construct. In fact, ISIS has been a key tool for Kissinger and the promoters of the project of a New Middle East, as ISIS has waged a campaign of destruction against both Syrian and Iraqi historical sites (Susli, 2016).

Iran has been one of Syria’s closest allies and since Bashar Assad rose to power, these ties have only strengthened. Syria has allied itself with Iran and relied on it even more during this conflict out of its sectarian affinity. Both countries thrive on their anti-Western rhetoric which has only served the purpose of creating hatred towards the West and gaining domestic support through uniting people against a common enemy. Despite the fact that they have opposing ideologies, with Syria advocating secularism and Iran a theocracy, both regimes allied over their mutual points of contention with Western powers such as the US and Israel. The Iranian Revolution had an impact across the Islamic world, polarizing opinions and mobilizing sectarian identities. Iran has been seen as a regional threat to the predominantly Sunni authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. As regional regimes felt threatened by the Islamic Revolution, they sought to discredit the revolution in any way possible (Fanar, 2011, p.13).

Regime change in Damascus is not the only or main way for the US and its allies to prevent Syria from standing with Iran. Destabilizing Syria and neutralizing it as a failed and divided state is the key. Sectarian fighting is not a haphazard outcome of the instability in Syria, but an assisted project that the US and its allies have steadily fomented with a clear intent to Balkanize the Syrian Arab Republic. Regionally, Israel above all other states has a major stake in securing this outcome. The Israelis actually have several publicly available documents, including the Yinon Plan, which outline that the destruction of Syria into a series of smaller sectarian states is one of their strategic objectives. So do American military planners.

Like Iraq next door, Syria does not need to be formally divided. For all intents and purposes, the country can be divided like Lebanon was alongside various fiefdoms and stretches of territory controlled by different groups during the Lebanese Civil War. The goal is to disqualify Syria as an external player.

Since 2006 and the Israeli defeat in Lebanon in that year there was renewed focus on the strategic alliance between Iran and Syria. Both countries have been very resilient in the face of US designs in their region. Together both have been key players for influencing events in the Middle East, from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.

A leaked Hillary Clinton email confirms that the Obama administration, with Hillary at the helm, orchestrated a civil war in Syria to benefit Israel. The new WikiLeaks release shows the then Secretary of State ordering a war in Syria in order to overthrow the government and oust President Assad, claiming it was the “best way to help Israel”.

The email makes it clear that it has been US policy from the very beginning to violently overthrow the Syrian government—and specifically to do this because it is in Israel’s interests. The document was one of many unclassified by the US Department of State under case number F-2014-20439, Doc No. C05794498, following the uproar over Clinton’s private email server kept at her house while she served as Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013. The email makes it clear that it has been US policy from the very beginning to violently overthrow the Syrian government—and specifically to do this because it is in Israel’s interests.

“The best way to help Israel deal with Iran’s growing nuclear capability is to help the people of Syria overthrow the regime of Bashar Assad,” Clinton forthrightly starts off by saying. Even though all US intelligence reports had long dismissed Iran’s “atom bomb” program as a hoax, Clinton continues to use these lies to “justify” destroying Syria in the name of Israel. She specifically links Iran’s mythical atom bomb program to Syria because, she says, Iran’s “atom bomb” program threatens Israel’s “monopoly” on nuclear weapons in the Middle East. If Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon, Clinton asserts, this would allow Syria to “go nuclear as well,” all of which would threaten Israel’s interests. Iran’s nuclear program and Syria’s civil war may seem unconnected, but they are. What Israeli military leaders really worry about — but cannot talk about — is losing their nuclear monopoly. An Iranian nuclear weapons capability would not only end that nuclear monopoly but could also prompt other adversaries, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to go nuclear as well. The result would be a precarious nuclear balance in which Israel could not respond to provocations with conventional military strikes on Syria and Lebanon, as it can today. If Iran were to reach the threshold of a nuclear weapons state, Tehran would find it much easier to call on its allies in Syria and Hezbollah to strike Israel, knowing that its nuclear weapons would serve as a deterrent to Israel responding against Iran itself. It is, Clinton continues, the “strategic relationship between Iran and the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria” that makes it possible for Iran to undermine Israel’s security.

This would not come about through a “direct attack,” Clinton admits, because “in the thirty years of hostility between Iran and Israel” this has never occurred, but through its alleged “proxies.” The end of the Assad regime would end this dangerous alliance. Israel’s leadership understands well why defeating Assad is now in its interests. Bringing down Assad would not only be a massive boon to Israel’s security, it would also ease Israel’s understandable fear of losing its nuclear monopoly. Then, Israel and the United States might be able to develop a common view of when the Iranian program is so dangerous that military action could be warranted. Clinton goes on to assert that directly threatening Bashar Assad “and his family” with violence is the “right thing” to do: In short, the White House can ease the tension that has developed with Israel over Iran by doing the right thing in Syria. With his life

and his family at risk, only the threat or use of force will change the Syrian dictator Bashar Assad’s mind. The email proves—as if any more proof was needed—that the US government has been the main sponsor of the growth of terrorism in the Middle East, and all in order to “protect” Israel (Tabatabai, 2016).

Conclusion

The Syrian civil war is a disaster of historic proportions that shows no sign of ending anytime soon. The latest figures released by the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR) suggest that it has killed nearly half a million people. Throughout all this carnage, only one country that borders Syria has managed to remain largely immune to the side effects of the war. That country is Israel. With constant fighting on the other side of the border, life in the Israeli-controlled part of the Golan Heights and in the Galilee goes on much as before the Syrian war began in 2011. This is not simply the result of good luck. It represents a quiet but notable success for an Israeli policy pursued over the last four years. This policy avoids taking sides on the larger question of who should govern Syria. Instead, Israel has sought to forge local alliances with rebel elements close to the border in order to prevent Iran and its allies from establishing a new platform for attacks on Israel, and keep Islamic State-aligned.

Israel has several principal objectives in the Syria conflict, including minimizing Iranian and Russian influence in Syria, blocking the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah, preventing Syria from posing a credible military threat to Israel or permitting Iran to do so, undermining the legitimacy of Syria’s claims to the Golan Heights, and preventing Sunni militants from establishing infrastructure or operational bases along Israel’s border. But mainly Syria is all about Iran for Israel. As if Tel Aviv has nothing to do whatsoever with the events inside Syria, Israeli commentators and analysts are now publicly insisting that Israel needs to deal with Iran by intervening inside Syria. The Israeli political and security establishments have been beset by differences over the Syrian war since it first broke out. Prior to the war, a powerful body of opinion within the country’s defence establishment regarded the regime of Bashar Assad as the “weakest link” in an Iran-led regional axis. The hope was that a blow could be dealt to the Iranians by tempting the non-Shia, non-ideological Assad regime away from its

alliance with Iran and toward a pro-U.S. stance, mainly through Israeli territorial concessions on the Golan Heights.

The support of Iran and Russia was clearly of central importance to the Assad regime. However, as Sunni Islamist and jihadi forces rose to prominence in the course of 2012-13, and Iranian and Russian assistance kept Assad in place, a "minority" view emerged. It held that the rise of Salafi jihadist forces among the Syrian rebels meant that the overall victory of the rebellion would not be in Israel's interest. It further posited that the Sunni Islamists had become the greater danger to Israel. This view failed to win the support of the policymaking elite. The Sunni Islamist threat was recognized, but the primacy of the Iranian threat remained. It is an open secret in Israel that the country maintains relations with Sunni rebel elements in the area adjoining the border. The reason is to ensure that they remain the dominant force on the border, rather than elements aligned with the Assad regime, Iran, or Hezbollah. The precise nature of the assistance afforded the rebels is not known. This quiet policy of cooperation, which has kept the Iranians, the regime, and Hezbollah away from the border, has of course been accompanied by more kinetic action on the part of Israel. This has included action close to the border to prevent Iranian-led attempts to construct infrastructure to facilitate attacks on the Golan Heights.

The result has been a synthesized view that goes something like this: Iran and its allies, of which the Assad regime in Syria is one, remain the most potent and dangerous threat facing Israel. As such, the primary goal of Israeli policy should be to prevent Iranian gains, and stop Iran and its allies from using the situation in Syria to improve their position against Israel. But given the nature of the rebellion against Assad and the forces dominating it, their victory could also be harmful to Israel. There is a danger that Assad's fall could produce a Sunni Islamist regime no less hostile than Iran, and perhaps more determined to act on this hostility. The ongoing engagement of Iran and Hezbollah in the Syrian war itself provides an inadvertent benefit to Israel. Hezbollah probably has around 10,000 fighters deployed in Syria at any given time. The movement has left over 1,000 dead in the war. Hezbollah has forces deployed in the northern Bekaa area to hold off the ongoing possibility of cross-border attacks by Sunni forces. With all this to deal with, renewed aggression

against Israel may well be a luxury the movement is currently unable to afford (Spyer, 2016).

Since the kindling of the conflict inside Syria in 2011, it was recognized, by friend and foe alike, that the events in that country were tied to a game plan that ultimately targets Iran, Syria's number one ally. De-linking Syria from Iran and unhinging the Resistance Bloc that Damascus and Tehran have formed has been one of the objectives of the foreign-supported anti-government militias inside Syria. Such a schism between Damascus and Tehran would change the Middle East's strategic balance in favour of the US and Israel.

Breaking the axis between Damascus and Tehran has also been a major goal of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Arab petro-sheikhdoms since the 1980s as part of a design to isolate Iran during the Iraq-Iran War. (Goodarzi, 2009) Moreover, the sectarian language being used is part of a construct; it is not a reflection of reality, but a reflection of Orientalist conjecture and desires that falsely stipulate that Muslims who perceive themselves as being Shia or Sunni are inherently at odds with one another as enemies. What is becoming apparent is that the differences between Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims that Washington has cultivated since the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 are now being augmented by Kurdish sectarianism.

It could be said that the Yinon plan had some success with the Kurdish PYD declaration of federalization. However, the Kurdish faction of the Syrian national coalition condemned PYD's declaration. Regardless, the declaration has no legal legitimacy. The region of Al Hasakah where a substantial portion of Syria's oil and agriculture lies, has a population of only 1.5 million people, 6% of Syria's total population. Of that, 1.5 million, only 40% are Kurdish, many of which do not carry Syrian passports. PYD's demand that the oil and water resources of 23 million people be given to a tiny part of its population is unlikely to garner much support amongst the bulk of Syria's population. (Susli, 2016) The conflict has destabilized the entire region, a development that has helped Islamic State expand its influence in addition to heating up the civil war between the Kurdish PKK and the Turkish government.

In the present, there is no telling what will come out of this conflict or who, if anyone, will prevail. The Syria that existed before January 28, 2011 is

unlikely to return. Once this conflict is over there will be new alliances and allegiances, the socio-economic landscape will have morphed, and its population distribution will have changed. There is much debate on the future of Syria and what will be left of this state when the war is over. The social, economic, religious, ethnic, and political conditions within Syria that have evolved from this conflict may lead to a breakdown of the national landscape, whereby Syria could undergo a de facto partitioning of its districts. The partitioning of Syria might cause sectarian differences to become more inflamed and further destabilize the country. The partitioning of Syria may be a temporary evolution of the present hostilities. There isn't an appetite for institutionalizing the new borders among international actors, and although the Syrian state would be broken up initially, the struggle wouldn't end there. Instead, this conflict will mutate to a new form in the post-Syrian society. Partitioning could have serious implications for its neighbours, but it also raises new challenges for the Arab Peace Initiative and for any future settlement between Israel and Syria on the Golan Heights. With the break-up of Syria, technically there would no longer be a state for Israel to negotiate with, so with the chaos ensuing in Syria, the war is indirectly causing Bashar's regime to lose any hold that it once had on the Golan, while providing Israel with the opportunity to build up its presence and hold on the territory.

Destabilizing Syria and neutralizing it as a failed and divided state is the key. Sectarian fighting is not a haphazard outcome of the instability in Syria, but an assisted project that the US and its allies have steadily fomented with a clear intent to balkanize the Syrian Arab Republic. Regionally, Israel above all other states has a major stake in securing this outcome. As previously mentioned the Israelis actually have several publicly available documents, including the Yinon Plan, which outline that the destruction of Syria into a series of smaller sectarian states is one of their strategic objectives. So do American military planners.

Like Iraq next door, Syria does not need to be formally divided. For all intents and purposes, the country can be divided like Lebanon was alongside various fiefdoms and stretches of territory controlled by different groups during the Lebanese Civil War. The goal is to disqualify Syria as an external player. Syria's civil war will linger, probably for years. Innocents will keep dying.

Significant parts of the country will remain outside the control of Damascus and its Russian and Iranian allies. However, the Assad regime has prevailed, thanks to Moscow. It will survive and the Middle Eastern balance of power has shifted to Russia's advantage.

Should Russian support to the Syrian government merely enable a stalemate rather than a newly empowered Assad regime, it could end up benefiting Israel; if Syrian, Iranian, and Hezbollah forces remain tied up in a long-term struggle for Syria, they are less able to threaten Israel directly from entrenched positions in Syrian territory. Israel's objective is to ensure that the Assad regime remains weak enough that it cannot threaten Israel directly or allow Iranian and Hezbollah forces to operate freely, particularly along the Israeli-Syrian border. A decisive Assad victory would enable Iran and Hezbollah to continue operating in the region with impunity. Israel does not, however, want to promote the collapse of the Assad regime, which could lead to a free-for-all in which extremists—when they are not busy fighting each other—could turn their attention toward Israel. If Assad were to fall, a single Syrian group or coalition—perhaps ISIS, or perhaps a group supported by an outside power, such as Russia, Turkey, or even the United States—could consolidate control over a large portion of Syrian territory. After doing so, such an entity could—even in defiance of its foreign patrons—actively seek a conflict with Israel as a means of establishing its legitimacy in the broader Arab or Muslim world. “For Israel, there is therefore some logic to preferring the survival of a weakened devil it knows to the uncertainty of the emergence of a devil it does not. Assad's conventional armed forces do not pose a military threat to Israel, even with assistance from Iran and Russia, and Assad has proven to be both predictable and deterrable in ways that Sunni jihadist groups are not (Koplow, 2015).

RAND Corporation's international policy analyst Larry Hanauer states that “A lingering stalemate—a situation in which Assad survives in Damascus but has limited presence in or influence over other parts of the country, particularly in the south—could enable a weakened Assad to keep a lid on instability without posing much of a threat to Israel. In such a case, Iran would have only an increasingly tenuous foothold in the Levant and would likely focus its efforts on bolstering its Syrian ally rather than on threatening Israel. ”

(Hanauer, 2016) Assad's collapse would likely lead to the Balkanization of the country into a multiplicity of fiefdoms, some of which are likely to be hostile to Israel or permit anti-Israeli activity. Continued stalemate in Syria could advance Israel's interests more than any decisive outcome.

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