

Saudis Seek Chaos to Cover Terror Tracks

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Russia's incisive military intervention in Syria has succeeded in not only stabilizing the Arab state and salvaging it from a terrorist takeover. Russia's maneuver also exposed the foreign-fueled nature of the conflict - as a criminal covert war of aggression for regime change.

To varying degrees, the complicity of Washington, Britain and France in sponsoring an illegal insurgency against the elected government of President Bashar al-Assad has been uncovered through Russia's military intervention.

So too exposed — even more so — in the criminal conspiracy are the West's regional client regimes. Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey has been shown through Russian airstrikes to be up to its neck in running oil and weapons smuggling rackets to support the terrorist networks in Syria.

And the other regime exposed by Russia is Saudi Arabia. This explains why the oil-rich autocratic monarchy is now trying to inflame the region with sectarian conflict, with the execution of the Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimir last weekend.

Sheikh Nimr was revered among the region's Shiite Muslims for his courageous, peaceful protests against oppression under the fundamentalist rulers of Saudi Arabia — the House of Saud, who profess an extremist version of Islam known as Wahhabism.

In the Wahhabi mentality, Shiites, Christians and others are considered "infidels" who should be put to death by the sword. It is no coincidence that many of the so-called jihadists fighting in Syria to overthrow the Assad government also subscribe to Wahhabism. There is clear evidence to show that the terror groups such as Daesh (Islamic State) and al Nusra Front are funded by the Wahhabi rulers of Saudi Arabia.

The gratuitous killing of Sheikh Nimr came after months of appeals for clemency. The appeals were made not only by the government of Iran — the main Shiite power in the Middle East — but also from several international rights groups, owing to the dubious judicial process in Saudi Arabia and the abundant evidence attesting to Sheikh Nimr's innocence. That the House of Saud went ahead with his execution thus points to a deliberate act to provoke regional passions and in particular those of Iran.

The torching of Saudi Arabia's embassy in Tehran, the war of words, and the severance of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran strongly suggest that the explosive reaction was premeditated. Now Arab allies of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, among others, are following suite by cutting diplomatic channels with Tehran. Some commentators are even wondering if an all-out war will erupt in the region.

Significantly, the mayhem unleashed by the Saudi execution of Sheikh Nimr appears to have irked Washington and other Western powers who patronize the Saudi rulers. Earlier this week, the New York Times reported that the Obama administration was "caught by surprise" and "expressed anger

at the Saudis... for negligent disregard for how it would inflame the region".

So why did the Saudi rulers decide to plunge the region into turmoil? Because Russia's military intervention in Syria has seriously spoiled the foreign conspiracy for regime change in that country. Furthermore, Russia's defeats against the array of illegally armed groups, such as Daesh and Nusra and their various offshoots, has exposed the sponsor links of these terror groups to foreign governments, in particular those in Ankara and Riyadh.

American political analyst Randy Martin says: "What seems to be emerging now is the repercussion from Russia blowing the cover off the conflict in Syria. Russia's military operations against the terror networks have dramatically exposed the Wahhabi Saudi rulers for what they are."

The analyst added: "Now that the House of Saud is exposed in its criminal machinations in Syria and its association with known terror groups, the Saudis have decided that their next best option is to incite a full-on war with Shiite Iran, and possibly even the Russians."

Martin pointed to the Russian airstrike on December 25 that eliminated the leadership of the jihadist militia, Jaish al-Islam, also known as Army of Islam. The strike in the militia's stronghold of East Ghouta, near the Syrian capital Damascus, killed its leader Zahran Alloush and other commanders.

Four days later, on December 29, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister Adel al-Jubeir publicly condemned the Russian air strike against Jaish al-Islam. Speaking in Riyadh, the Saudi minister said the killing would complicate the forthcoming peace talks on Syria due to take place later this month in Geneva. Al-Jubeir expressed dismay, telling reporters: "I don't know what the Russians have in mind."

The official Saudi reaction to the killing of Zahran Alloush and other Jaish al-Islam members clearly illustrates the involvement of Saudi Arabia with known terror groups in Syria. The Jaish al-Islam militia is known to share fighters and weapons with the al Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra, which is an officially designated terrorist group, according to the US government and the European Union.

Russia's military intervention in Syria has done two things. It has, firstly, put paid to the covert terror war that the West and its regional allies have been waging surreptitiously in Syria since March 2011 for the purpose of regime change. This result has thus made the political track the only feasible alternative by which the Western powers can hope to achieve their long-held objective of regime change in Syria. Hence Geneva.

Saudi Arabia, the region's hardliner in the regime-change project, is opposed to the political option, which has been earnestly pursued by US Secretary of State John Kerry over the past three months, since Russia began its air operations in Syria. "Saudi officials have long said they think that Mr Kerry's effort is doomed to failure, and that was before Sunday's diplomatic breach with Iran," noted the New York Times.

The second thing that Russia's military intervention has done, as analyst Randy Martin points out, is that the links of Saudi Arabia to terror groups have been laid bare for all to see.

This week, the Saudi ambassador to the United Nations, Abdallah al-Mouallimi, claimed that the regional war of words with Iran will not deflect from his country's participation in the Geneva peace talks on Syria.

However, that is just a public-relations fig leaf. The Saudi rulers find political negotiations anathema because that would mean talking with their "infidel" enemy of Iran, thus giving the latter

more political esteem in the region, and also because the House of Saud persists with the ultimatum that Syria's President Assad "has to go".

It is for this reason that the Saudis last month said they retain the military option to invade Syria to oust Assad and why the oil-rich kingdom set up a 34-nation "anti-terror" military coalition with a license to invade any country where it deems a "terror threat" exists.

In other words, what has emerged is Saudi Arabia's belligerent policy in the region and its collusion with terror groups. And it is Russia's decisive, devastating anti-terror military intervention in Syria that has uncovered these nefarious connections.

That is why the Saudi rulers went ahead with the execution of the Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. The chaos and bloodletting they hope to unleash is intended to cover up their terror tracks in Syria.

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