

Israel considering attack on Syria

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has twice asked Jordan for its support to bomb Syria's alleged chemical weapons facilities.

Citing intelligence sources in Israel and Jordan, *The Atlantic* wrote that, while Israel could attack without Jordanian approval—as it did when it bombed an alleged nuclear installation in September 2007—Tel Aviv was concerned about the repercussions of such an attack for Jordan. One intelligence source said that since “A number of sites are not far from the border, the Jordanians have to be very careful about provoking the regime, and they assume the Syrians would suspect Jordanian complicity in an Israeli attack.”

According to the report, Israeli drones patrol the skies over the Jordan-Syria border, with both American and Israeli drones keeping watch over suspected Syrian chemical weapons sites. Allegations that the regime of President Bashar al-Assad is preparing to use chemical weapons against its opponents is being used as a pretext for a military operation for regime change in Syria by NATO in order to isolate Iran.

Amman reportedly turned down these requests. It could not do otherwise, given that such overt collusion with Israel would have a devastating impact in Syria and throughout the Middle East. Were it to become widely recognised that Israel is indeed backing the armed rebels, this would expose the degree to which the Islamist Syrian opposition forces—despite their anti-Zionist rhetoric—are fighting on behalf of the major imperialist powers.

Washington is increasingly reliant on Sunni Islamist governments, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt and Palestinian Hamas in Gaza, and Islamist groups linked to Al Qaeda to promote its strategic interests in the oil-rich region. It is through them that the opposition in Syria is armed and organised. But Washington does so in tandem with its strategic partner, Israel, which provides vital intelligence and

training behind the scenes.

Israel has long cooperated closely on security matters with Turkey, Jordan and the pro-Washington faction in Lebanon, front-line states in the ongoing attempt to unseat the Assad regime. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Israeli and Jordanian military intelligence trained and armed the military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in its attempt to overthrow the Syrian government.

DEBKAFfile, which has close links to Israel's military and intelligence apparatus, has reported that the CIA is actively coordinating the response of Israel, the Gulf States, Jordan and Lebanon to events in Syria. The *Jerusalem Post* noted the CIA is increasingly dependent on Israel for reliable ground intelligence from inside Syria, which Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, is able to provide because it has many Arabic speakers. These include Israeli Jews who came from Syria in the 1950s and 1960s.

Last March, the capture by Syrian government forces of 700 Arab and Western gunmen in the Baba Amr district of Homs, a former rebel stronghold, revealed the involvement of Mossad, the CIA, Blackwater (a US mercenary corporation), Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Operating from a coordination office in Qatar that was jointly sponsored by Washington and the Gulf States, these agents together with members of the Syrian National Council oversaw the rebel military operations in Homs.

The gunmen included Qatari intelligence agents and non-Arab fighters from Afghanistan, Turkey and France, who were using advanced Israeli, European and American weapons as well as Israeli grenades, night binoculars, and communication systems.

Last July, Israel's defence minister, Ehud Barak, had discussions with his US counterpart, Leon Panetta, about the situation in Syria. He was quoted as telling him, “We believe that the assassination of the top

Syrian government officials will speed up Assad's downfall."

He made this statement just after a bomb exploded inside the National Security building in Damascus, killing Defence Minister Daoud Rajha and Deputy Defence Minister Assef Shawkat, Assad's brother-in-law.

Last month, DEBKAFfile reported that Syrian rebels had destroyed Assad's key electronic warning radar station facing Israel—M-1. It noted, "This has blinded the two eyes which Syrian air, air defence and missile forces had trained on Israel and crippled, though not completely dismantled, their ability to go to war against Israel, Jordan or Saudi Arabia."

The report pointed out that Hezbollah had thereby lost its primary source of intelligence for an offensive against Israel.

Such a knock-out blow to Syria's defence system, and other important military and strategic sites, could only have been carried out with the assistance of Israeli military intelligence.

The *Sunday Times* disclosed that as part of Israel's "secret war" to track Syria's chemical and biological armaments and sabotage their development, Israeli Special Forces are operating inside Syria. They are working with US, Jordanian and Turkish Special Forces, ostensibly focusing on monitoring chemical weaponry.

DEBKAFfile reported Saturday that the Syrian opposition had seized a "chlorine factory" at Al Safir, the largest chemical store and base, which also houses Syria's Scud-D missiles armed with chemical warheads.

Such reports have a definite propaganda purpose. Israeli officials, including Defence Minister Ehud Barak, have repeatedly threatened a military attack to ensure that Syria's chemical and biological weapons do not fall into the hands of Hezbollah or "terrorist groups and other extremist elements" that make up much of the armed Syrian opposition. Last July, Barak warned, "Syria has advanced antiaircraft missiles, surface-to-surface missiles and elements of chemical weapons. I have directed the IDF [Israeli Defence Force] to prepare for a situation where we will need to consider the possibility of an attack."

A few days later, the White House said that the US was monitoring very closely Syria's chemical weapons

stockpile and "actively consulting" with Damascus's neighbours to stress its concerns over the security of these weapons and Syria's responsibility to safeguard them.

According to the *New York Times*, the US had opposed an Israeli attack "because of the risk that it would give Mr. Assad an opportunity to rally support against Israeli interference".

More recently, Israel's ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, warned that a transfer of chemical weapons from Syria to the Lebanese militia Hezbollah would be a "game changer".

Israel, like its backers in Washington, is for the moment ready to work alongside Al Qaeda-type forces in order to stoke sectarian, communal and ethnic tensions to overthrow Assad. It calculates that the disintegration of Syria into warring factions will, like Lebanon, make it easy to manage and, crucially, will weaken Iran.

Oren said that Assad's fall would be a boon to Israel and the Middle East, even if radical Islamists did try to fill the vacuum left by his departure. He said, "There's the possibility that you'll have Sunni extremist elements who will try to come to the fore. Our opinion is that any situation would be better than the current situation," in which the Syrian regime has a strategic alliance with Iran and the Lebanese Shiite Muslim terrorist group Hezbollah.



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