

The Architects of Al-Qaeda and ISIS

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1979: The Russians Invade Afghanistan

1979 was a very important year. Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel and became an American ally. Moving Egypt away from the Soviet sphere of influence was something the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat paid with his life in 1981. Sadat was murdered by the Egyptian islamists, I guess with the help of Iran, Muammar Qaddafi of Libya and Hafez al-Assad of Syria, who were Iranian allies. Iran gave the name to of the assassin to an Iranian street to honor him. Losing Egypt was a great loss for the Soviets because Egypt was, and still is, a country of great geopolitical significance.

In 1979 the Iranian Islamists overturned the pro-American Monarch of Iran with the Islamic Revolution, and Iran became an Islamic Democracy. The Americans gained Egypt but lost Iran, and with the Carter Doctrine of 1980 they declared that if the Americans interests in the Middle East were threatened the United States would use military force. That basically meant that if anyone dared to mess with Saudi Arabia he would have to go to war with the United States.

Map Middle East and North Africa



At the other side of the equation the Soviets were not happy they had lost Egypt, and they were not as sure as they used to be that they could count on Arab national socialists like Sadat. If Sadat turned to United States others could do it too.

Moreover, after the fall of Iran they have more confidence and they are more optimistic, and they decide to follow a more aggressive foreign policy.

The outcome was that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in order to bring a communist government to power.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a great problem for the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis believed that if the Soviets were to stabilize Afghanistan the Afghan communists would soon claim the Pakistani Pashtunistan. After all the Afghans had never stopped claiming the Pakistani part of Pashtunistan. Pashtuns are the majority in Afghanistan, but they are the second largest

ethnic group in Pakistan, with the Punjabis being the first ethnic group by far. The Pakistani army is made of Punjabis.

Map Pashtunistan



For the problems with Pashtunistan see “The 2 Faces of the Taliban”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/07/12/the-2-faces-of-the-taliban/>

After the Soviets invade Afghanistan the Americans and the Saudis will start funding Islamists who will go to Pakistan in order to be trained, and then they are sent to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets.

The Chinese also sent to Pakistan Uyghurs Islamists from their Muslim province of Xin Jiang, in order to be trained and sent to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. The Soviets already had very strong army units at the Chinese borders i.e. Kazakhstan and Mongolia, and the Chinese were not at all happy to see the Soviets coming to Afghanistan too.

Map

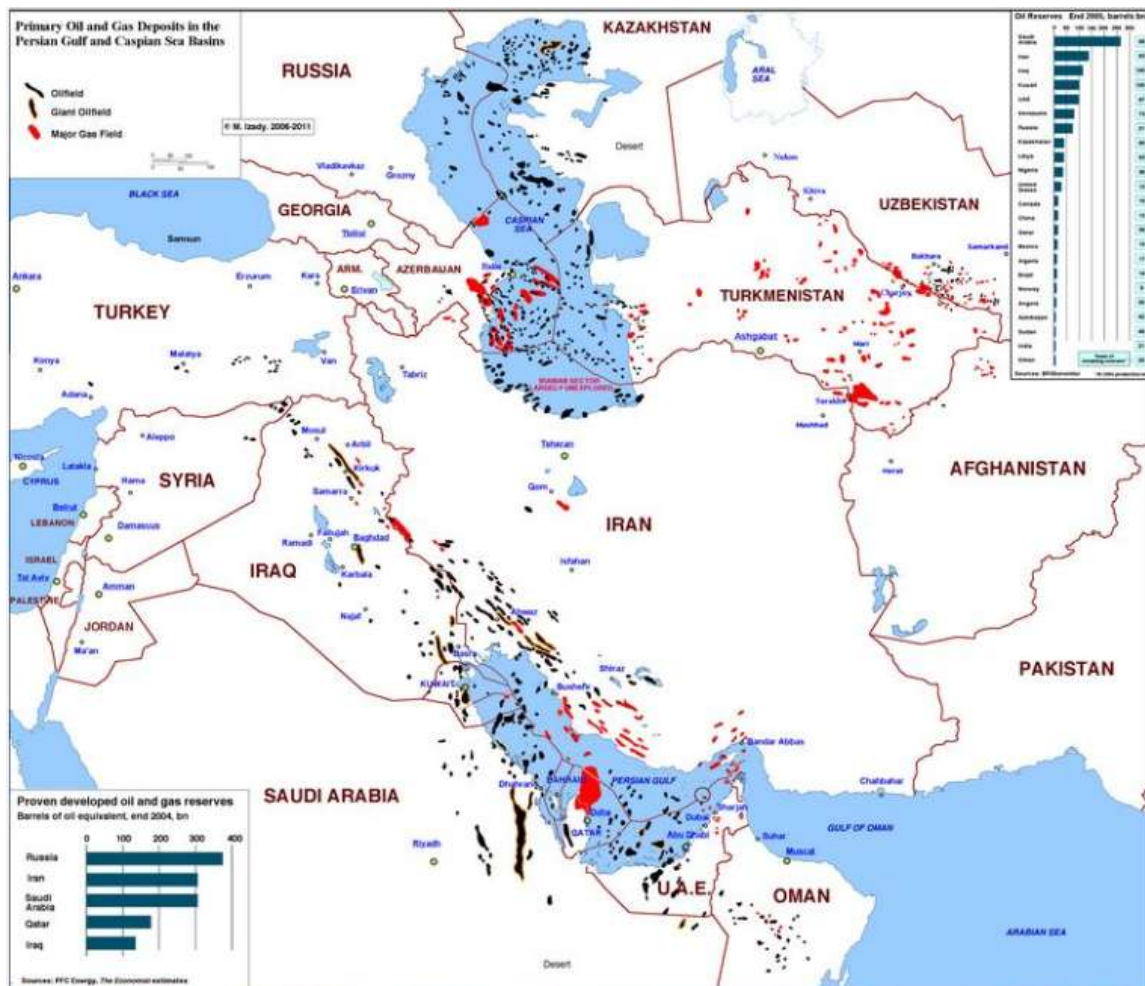


At the time the only reliable ally of China was Pakistan. With red you can see the Soviet allies and with green the American ones. See “China’s Isolation During the Cold War”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/06/25/chinas-isolation-during-the-cold-war/>

The Iranian Islamists did not want to be part of the Arab-American alliance against the Soviets, but they started independently funding Shia Islamists in Afghanistan in order to fight the Soviets. From 1980 to 1988 the Iranians will go to a war with Saddam Hussein (Iraq), and the Soviets are an ally of Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein invaded Iran to take the rich in oil southwestern provinces of Iran. Arabs are the majority in this region of Iran.

Map Oil (black) and Natural Gas (red) of the Middle East



After the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan there was enthusiasm in the Muslim world. All good Muslims wanted to go and kill the infidels. A Jihad against the Soviets would take place, and in 1989 the Soviets would have to leave from Afghanistan. In Afghanistan the Soviets had to fight with the Americans, the Chinese, the Arabs, the Iranians and the Pakistanis. It was the Soviets against everybody.

Map The Soviet Invasion and the Jihad Against the Soviets



1989: The Architect of Al-Qaeda of Iraq goes to Pakistan

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian thug, arrived in Pakistan in 1989, in order to receive military training and fight in Afghanistan. The 23 year old Zarqawi was one of the many violent young men who were sent to Pakistan by the Saudis and the Americans to fight the Soviets.

The year Zarqawi arrived in Pakistan is the year the Soviets are leaving Afghanistan (1989). The Soviets and the Americans agreed not to get involved in Afghanistan after the Soviets left. The Chinese did not want to get involved in a Muslim war either, because they were afraid that there would be a rise of terrorism in their Muslim Province of Xin Jiang if they did.

Thus a war broke out between the Iranians and the Pakistanis in Afghanistan. The Irnaians were supported by India and the Pakistanis were supported by the Arabs of the Persian Gulf. Zarqawi fought in this war on the side of the Arabs and the Pakistanis.

In 1993 Zarqawi went back to Jordan, and he set up his own terrorist organization. His aim was to overthrow the pro-American Jordanian King and to turn Jordan to an Islamic emirate.

The Jordanian King was pro-American, but he was also closely cooperating with Saddam Hussein who was pro-Soviet. The Iraqis gave the Jordanians

free oil, and the Jordanians allowed the Iraqis to use their port at the Gulf of Aqaba, in order to avoid the Iranians and the Syrians. Remember that Saddam is an enemy of Saudi Arabia too. The Saudis and the Iraqis cooperate against the Iranians, but they are enemies. They are all competing in the oil markets, and like everybody else Saddam Hussein accuses Saudi Arabia of producing too much oil and pushing price downwards. See “The Production of Oil and the Price of Oil”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/07/24/the-production-of-oil-and-the-price-of-oil/>

Map The Gulf of Aqaba



<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/11/egypt-saudi-arabia-tiran-sanafir-red-sea-is-lands-transfer>

Map The Alliance between Jordan and Iraq



In the meantime, while Zarqawi was in Pakistan and Afghanistan (1989-1993), Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and took its oilfields, hoping that the Americans and the Saudis would not attack him because they would be afraid that this would enhance the Iranians. But he was wrong. The Saudis invited the Americans to come to the Gulf, and the Americans pushed Saddam out of Kuwait. But Saddam was right, and the Americans did not dare to overturn him even though they were outside Baghdad.

Therefore when Zarqawi came back to Jordan in 1993 there was already the rift between Osama bin Laden and the Saudi King, because Osama bin Laden, and many other Arabs too, did not want the American army in the Gulf. Obviously Iran did not want the American army either. Osama bin Laden is already in Sudan, where he will stay for the period 1992-1996, in order for Hezbollah and Iran to train Al-Qaeda. See “The Hezbollah – Al-Qaeda Axis”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/05/22/the-hezbollah-al-qaeda-axis/>

I do not think that Osama bin Laden was randomly chosen by Iran and Hezbollah. Osama bin Laden's mother was a Syrian Shia, even though Osama was a Sunni. Actually his mother was a Syrian Alawite, like Bashar al Assad, and Osama was very mild with the Shias. The Alawites are a sect of Shia Islam.

Therefore Osama bin Laden was an ideal candidate for the Iranians and Hezbollah, because he could cooperate with them very well. Remember that Al-Qaeda was an un-holy alliance between Sunni Arabs from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, with the Shias of Iran and Hezbollah, in order to fight the Saudi King and the Americans.

Al-Qaeda was the Sunni version of Hezbollah, and the Arabs were putting the money and Hezbollah was putting the weapons, the training and the espionage. Osama was an ideal candidate, and he was also a man who grew up in the same circles of the Saudi Royal family, and he had plenty of connections. Unfortunately people who read NAZI and Communist propaganda think that Al-Qaeda is a CIA organization.

For the mother of Osama bin Laden see "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi", August 2006.

46th Paragraph

According to several different accounts of the meeting, bin Laden distrusted and disliked al-Zarqawi immediately. He suspected that the group of Jordanian prisoners with whom

al-Zarqawi had been granted amnesty earlier in the year had been infiltrated by Jordanian intelligence; something similar had occurred not long before with a Jordanian jihadist cell that had come to Afghanistan. Bin Laden also disliked al-Zarqawi's swagger and the green tattoos on his left hand, which he reportedly considered un-Islamic. Al-Zarqawi came across to bin Laden as aggressively ambitious, abrasive, and overbearing. His hatred of Shiites also seemed to bin Laden to be potentially divisive—which, of course, it was. (Bin Laden's mother, to whom he remains close, is a Shiite, from the Alawites of Syria.)

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/>

In Jordan Zarqawi went to prison for terrorist activities. In 1999 he was released and went back to Afghanistan, where he met for the first time Osama bin Laden. The two men did not like each other from the beginning. Zarqawi told the respected leader of Al-Qaeda that it was a sin to help the Taliban fight the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, because it was a sin for a Muslim to kill another Muslim. In essence Zarqawi was siding with Iran in Afghanistan because the Northern Alliance was the ally of Iran and India, and the Taliban were the ally of the Arabs and the Pakistanis.

Zarqawi was a lot more of an Iranian guy when compared to Osama bin Laden. Osama bin Laden cooperated with Iran and Hezbollah but he was not an Iranian guy. Zarqawi never accepted to fight the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan during his second time in Afghanistan. Obviously during his first time he did (1989-1993). Only when the Americans invaded Afghanistan in 2001 Zarqawi joined Al-Qaeda in order to fight the Americans.

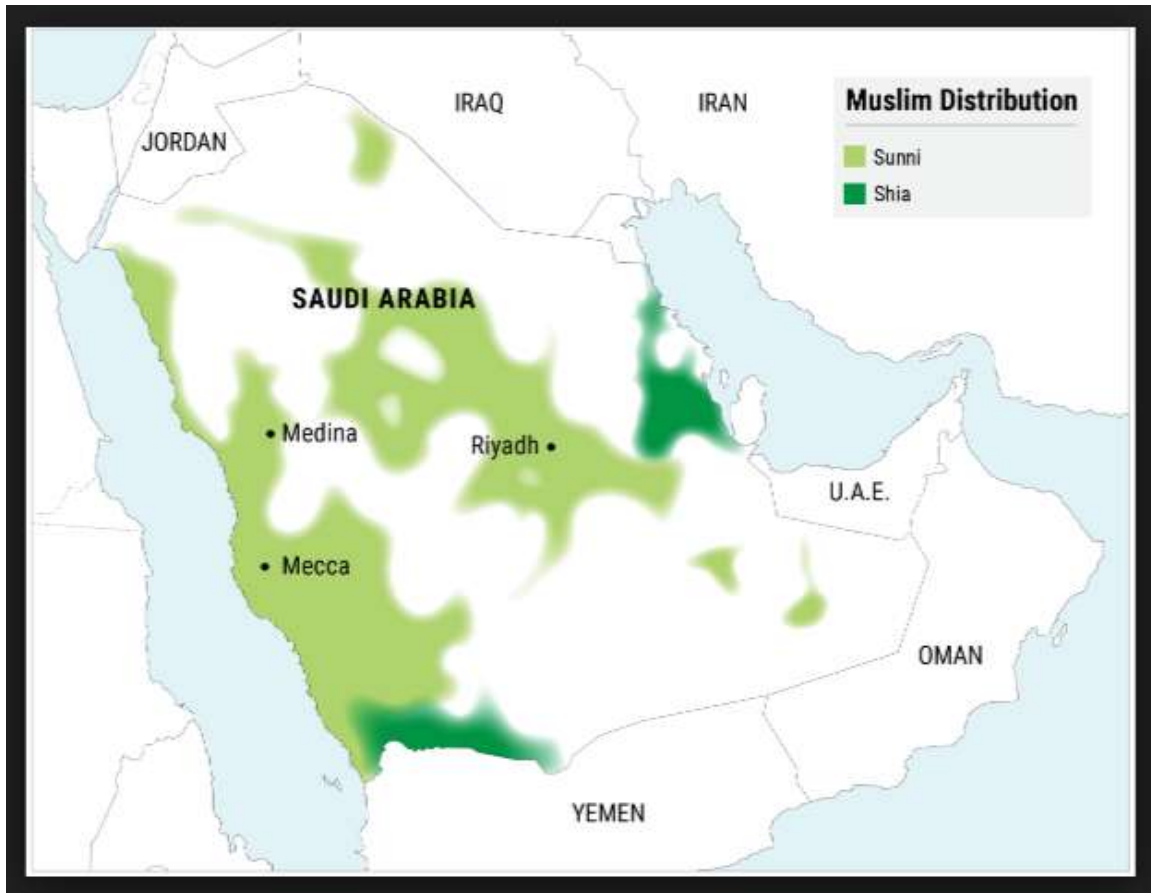
That's why the training camp that was given to Zarqawi to train his men was at the Herat province of Afghanistan, very close to the Iranian borders, in order for him to have easy access to Iran.

What is very interesting is that Zarqawi, contrary to Osama, was very anti-Shia, and he believed that the Shias in the Arab countries should be executed. And that raises the question why he was chosen by the Iranians and why he received so much support from them.

The answer is that the Iranians need Sunni anti-Shiites too. For example it is good for the Iranians when Al-Qaeda attacks the Shiites of Saudi Arabia, in order for the Saudi Shiites to feel unprotected by the Saudi King, and look somewhere else for protection.

Note that the Saudi Shiites mainly live in the rich in oil regions of Saudi Arabia near the Persian Gulf. Obviously the Iranians want unrest near the Saudi oilfields. The truth is that Iran does not give a damn about the Shiites of the Arab world. Iran and Hezbollah want to use them against their enemies.

Map Sunnis (light green) and Shia (dark green) of Saudi Arabia



<http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2015/the-prince-of-counterterrorism>

Moreover there was always the possibility that the Americans would attack Iraq, and in that case the Iranians would need a Sunni who would attack the Shiites who would dare to cooperate with the Americans. Actually that's exactly what Zarqawi did when the Americans invaded Iraq in 2003.

Zarqawi fought the Americans in Afghanistan in 2001, and when the Americans destroyed the rebels, Zarqawi entered Iran, where he stayed for about a year. When the war in Iraq was coming, Zarqawi crossed the Iranian-Iraqi borders and entered the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and together

with the people of Saddam Hussein he started fighting the Kurds who were cooperating with the Americans.

That's the reason the Americans were saying that Saddam Hussein was cooperating with Al-Qaeda. That was true, but obviously the Americans knew that Zarqawi was an Iranian and not an Iraqi man. Saddam Hussein could not establish with Al-Qaeda the strong connections the Iranians had, because Saddam Hussein was an enemy of the Saudi King, but together they were fighting the Iranians.

A few months before the Americans attack Saddam, Zarqawi will leave Iraqi Kurdistan, and will go to Iraq with his men, in order to prepare for the coming war. It is the time Saddam Hussein is building many terrorist channels in Iraq, because he knows that he will lose the war, and he prepares the country for a guerilla war. Jihadists are coming to Iraq from all over the world to fight the Americans, and they are invited by Saddam.

After Saddam's fall, Zarqawi carried out many terrorist attacks against the Americans, but also against the Shiites of Iraq who were cooperating with the Americans. The mission of Zarqawi was to cause a civil war between the Sunnis and the Shias of Iraq. This civil war would prevent the Americans from stabilizing the country.

Osama bin Laden had asked Zarqawi many times to make his group a franchise of Al-Qaeda, but Zarqawi had never accepted, maybe because he was closer to Iran than Osama. But in 2004 Zarqawi finally pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda, and his group became Al-Qaeda of Iraq. Maybe

Zarqawi thought it was good for him to distance himself a bit from Iran at this point. In Iraq there were all the ex-officers of Saddam Hussein who wanted to fight the Americans, and these people were enemies of Iran. Maybe it was not good for him to look too much of an Iranian guy.

Maybe that's why Zarqawi decided to become Al-Qaeda in 2004. Or maybe he received a lot of funding from the Saudis and the Qataris and the other Arabs of the Persian Gulf and he wanted to distance himself from Iran. I am not sure what exactly it was.

But even after becoming Al-Qaeda of Iraq Zarqawi will be quite independent from central Al-Qaeda, and he will be a lot more violent than Osama wants him to be.

In 2006 the Americans will kill Zarqawi, but in the meantime Zarqawi had managed to establish Al-Qaeda of Iraq, which is the predecessor of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which in turn is the predecessor of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which in turn is the predecessor of the Islamic State (IS).

For the violent career of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi see a great article by the American magazine Atlantic "The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi", August 2006.

Atlantic is one of the oldest American magazines (1857).

2003: The Americans Invade Iraq

In 2003 the Americans invaded Iraq.

In 2002 the Americans saw the rise of the Islamists in Turkey. The Turkish Islamist were supported by the Iranians and I believe by the Russians too. The Kemalist Turks are strong US allies and they wanted Turkey to be tied to the Western world. With the rise of the Islamists Turkey will distance herself from the West and will move towards Asia, and in the 2000s the Turkish-Russian natural gas pipelines will go ahead (Blue Stream).

At the same time that the Americans were seeing Turkey moving closer to Russia, in order to get cheap natural gas, they were also seeing Saudi Arabia moving closer to China, in order to boost her oil exports. The Iranians and the Iraqis, together with certain Saudi and Qatari circles were supporting terrorist attacks against the Americans, who were trying to bring the oil and natural gas of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to India.

The Americans were left with no allies in the Persian Gulf. After the Al-Qaeda attacks at the Twin Towers the Americans even had to move their military bases from Saudi Arabia to Qatar. But even donors from Qatar were funding Al-Qaeda. The Qataris wanted the American bases as an insurance against the Iranians and the Saudis, but they are not true allies of United Staes.

The Americans were desperate for allies, and they decide to liberate the Shia majority (65%) of Iraq, and the Kurds of Iraq, from the ruthless ruling of Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein has a Sunni army of 250,000 men.

Map Enemies and Allies of USA



The plan was that the Shia of Iraq and the Kurds would see the Americans as liberators, and the Americans would help them establish a western type democracy which would be envied by all the Muslims.

It seems simple right? You liberate some people, you give them their freedom, and you just expect them to like you. But this is the Middle East. The political elites are very very strong and very very very corrupt.

Map Kurdistan



The Iranians did not want the Americans to become allies of the Iraqi Shia. The Iranians were also using the Iraqi Shias against Saddam Hussein for decades. But of course the Iranians did not want the Americans next to them.

The Saudis did not want the Iraqi Shia governing Iran. The Saudis hated Saddam, but Saddam was keeping the Iranians away from them. And of course neither the Iranians nor the Saudis wanted the oil and gas of Iraq to start flowing to the international markets.

The Syrian Alawites of Bashar al Assad were very upset with the Iraq War, because they were also a ruthless minority which was ruling over a Sunni majority and the Kurds of Syria, and they thought they could be the next ones. That would be a huge problem for the Russians too. After all the Iraq is a road that leads to Syria.

Map The Plan of the Islamic State



The Turks saw the oil of Northern Iraq falling in Kurdish hands. As long as Saddam was ruling Iraq the Turks and Saddam were hunting the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq together, and Saddam was selling cheap oil to Turkey. Turkey could buy Saddam's oil from Northern Iraq at very good prices because Saddam was an enemy of Iran and Syria, and very often economic sanctions were imposed on him by the West.

Moreover, by gaining control of the oil and natural gas of Northern Iraq, the Kurds could become stronger, and could ask for an independent Kurdistan

in Iraq, which could ignite similar aspirations to the Kurds of Turkey. The West wanted an independent Kurdistan since the First World War.

To reassure the Turks, President George Bush was referring to the Kurds of Turkey (PKK) as “our common enemy”. I don’t know if that was good enough for the Turks because the Kurds are communicating vessels, and the Americans were helping the Kurds of Iraq. Probably the American assurances weren’t good enough for the Turks.

All these countries started a “Holly” war against the United States in Iraq, and even though one would think that it would be a piece of cake for the Americans to create a democratic Iraq, this mission started looking more like science fiction.

Besides, a democratic Iraq, which would be envied by all Muslims, would be an embarrassment for the Arabs, the Iranians and the Turks, and it was the last thing they wanted.

Iraq in 2003 was for the Americans what Afghanistan was for the Russians in 1979. And Syria was in 2003 for the Americans what Pakistan was in for the Russians in 1979. In 1979 the Pakistanis thought that the Soviet presence in Afghanistan would endanger the Pakistani Pashtunistan, and they started letting in Afghanistan Islamists from all over the world to fight the Soviets.

In 2003 Assad in Syria thought that the Americans could turn against his own Alawite minority in Syria, once they were done in Iraq, and he started letting Islamists from all over the world to enter Iraq through Syria, in order

to make Iraq a living hell for the Americans. All sorts of alliances were taking place in Iraq before the war. The Generals of Assad were cooperating with the Generals of Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein was talking to the Iranians, the Iranians were talking to the Arabs of the Gulf, and all these were talking to the Russians. Therefore there was quite a simple situation. It was everyone against the Americans and the Kurds.

In 2003 there was enthusiasm in the Muslim world like there was in 1979. All the good Muslims wanted to go to Iraq and kill crusaders.

Therefore even though it seemed a piece of cake for the Americans to find an ally in Iraq, since they liberated 85% of the population, a Jihad started in Iraq against them, financed with petrodollars, financed from both from enemies and allies of the United States.

The Turks did not allow the Americans to use their military bases to attack Saddam, and the head of Human Rights in Turkey said they Americans were committing genocide in Iraq, and he even compared them to Hitler.

Creating a democratic Iraq would be great for the Americans, and it would be great for the Iraqi people, but it would be too bad for the Arabs, the Turks and the Iranians. As a result it did not come into being.

2003: The Architect of the Islamic State goes to Syria

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Americans dissolved his huge Sunni army, hoping to create an Arab Shia army that would be used by the Shia majority to rule Iraq, which in turn would become an American ally. Within the 250 thousand soldiers of the Iraqi army that was dissolved there are many officers who had been fighting the Americans for years and who had been trained by the Soviets and the KGB. See “Towards an Alliance Between Russia and ISIS”?

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/05/22/towards-an-alliance-between-russia-and-isis/>

Many of the ex-people of Saddam Hussein joined Al-Qaeda of Iraq in order to make a career and earn a living, and also to fight the Americans. Haji Bakr was one of the many ex-officers of the secret services of Saddam Hussein who joined Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda after the fall of Iraq. Hadji Bakr was a very capable man and he started meeting Bashar al-Assad to organize the resistance.

In 2003 things in Iraq were simple, because the war in Syria hadn't broke out yet, and therefore there was a relatively unified front against the Americans and the Kurds. I believe that even the Turks were happy with the attacks against the Americans.

Assad closely cooperated with the ex-officers of Saddam Hussein, in order to block the Americans in Iraq and stop them from moving to Syria.

Map Syria-Iraq

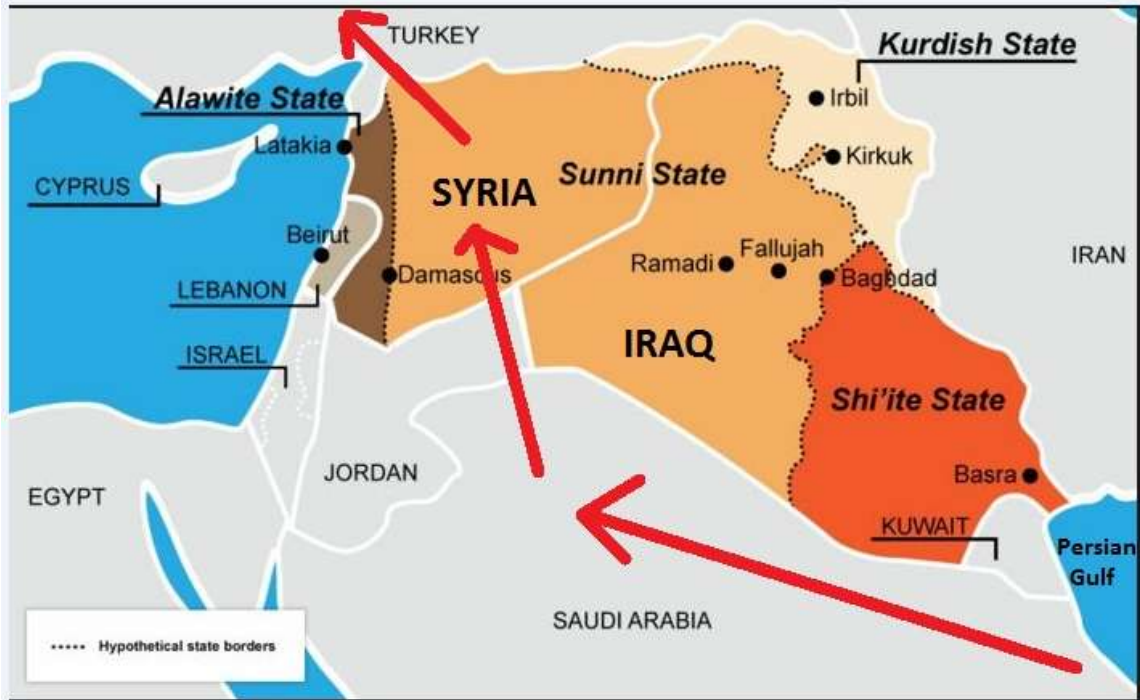


Things got a lot more complicated in 2011, when the Turks and the Qataris used the Muslim Brotherhood to attack Assad, in order to promote the Qatar-Turkey Pipeline. Now the Arabs of the Gulf and the Turks were at opposite sides from the Russians and the Iranians.

The Russians and the Alawites of Syria were afraid that NATO would support the Turks and the Qataris, and they were very right to believe so. Therefore Assad and the Russians asked Haji Bakr to prepare a plan for the creation of an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, which would unify the Sunnis of Syria and Iraq, in order to attack the Americans at one end (Iraq), and in order to prevent the Americans from finding allies in Sunni Syria and Sunni Iraq. The Sunnis that would be supported by the Russians and Assad (ISIS) had to kill any rebels who would cooperate with NATO.

By using the ex-officers of Saddam Hussein Assad and the Russians were trying to take control of the Sunni parts of Syria and Iraq.

Map Sunni, Shia, Alawite, Kurdish Parts of Syria



http://cdn2.vox-cdn.com/assets/4396135/sunni-shia-kurd_state_crop.jpg

Assad gave the Sunni Jihadists he was supporting the oil fields of Sunni Syria, and he started buying their oil to finance them. In reality the Jihadists that were cooperating with Assad were run by the best people of Saddam Hussein who were simply using an Islamic “coating”.

Actually the oil of ISIS was bought from ISIS by a Russian businessman close to Putin. See Wall Street Journal “An Energy Mogul Becomes Entangled With Islamic State”, May 2016.

Assad and Putin allowed Turkey to buy cheap oil from ISIS too, in order to give Turkey the motive to support ISIS. And indeed Turkey cooperated closely with ISIS in the oil sector. Remember that when things between Turkey and Russia became ugly, with the downing of the Russian plane, Putin accused Erdogan's son Bilal Erdogan for doing business with ISIS. See the state owned Russian news agency RT "Ankara's oil business with ISIS", March 2016.

When Assad and Putin were angry with Erdogan, they would "fight" ISIS, by first informing ISIS, and then by substituting ISIS men with the men of Assad, in order to prevent Erdogan from doing business with ISIS i.e bying oil.

Another gift that Assad and Putin were giving Turkey with ISIS was that they allowed ISIS to hunt the Kurds of Syria, and that was a great gift for the Turks, because the Americans wanted rebels who would protect their Kurd allies. That's why Erdogan was helping ISIS. ISIS was selling oil to Turkey, but more important than that ISIS was killing the Kurds of Syria, something forbidden by the Americans.

Essentially Putin and Assad were giving the Turks the chance to have the Sunni parts of Syira and Iraq, and also to buy the oil of the region, but only by using a force that would make sure NATO would never set foot there i.e. ISIS, which in turn means that the Qatar-Turkey pipeline would not be constructed.

The Iranians followed the example of the Russians and Assad, and in Sunni Syria they supported al-Nusra i.e. the subsidiary of Al-Qaeda. Al-Nusra was created in Syria by Al-Qaeda of Iraq, but there were many problems between Al-Qaeda of Iraq and Al-Qaeda of Syria, because Al-Qaeda of Iraq was the ex-people of Saddam Hussein who had promised the Russians and Assad not to attack Assad, and instead focus on building an Islamic State in the Sunni parts of Syria and Iraq.

Al-Qaeda of Syria i.e. al-Nusra, wanted to fight Assad, because the people of Saddam Hussein were mainly in Iraq and not in Syria. As a result there was fighting between Al-Qaeda of Iraq and Al-Qaeda of Syria, and in the end the Al-Qaeda of Iraq became ISIS. Al-Qaeda of Syria i.e. al-Nusra broke ties with ISIS and started fighting both ISIS and Assad.

Al-Nusra was influenced by the mother company of Al-Qaeda, and she wanted to fight Assad. Remember that al-Qaeda is an Arab terror group, even though it was trained by Hezbollah and Iran. Al-Qaeda and Iran cooperated but they also fought each other.

Obviously not all the people of Saddam Hussein were working for Putin and Assad (ISIS). Some of them were working for Al-Qaeda too. It depends on who pays better.

In the end al-Nusra was bought by Qatar and she quit the global Jihad, and instead she focused on fighting ISIS and Assad. For the rebranding of al-Nusra see Business Insider “It looks like Al-Qaeda is 'laying a trap' for the US — and giving Russia exactly what it wants”, July 2016.

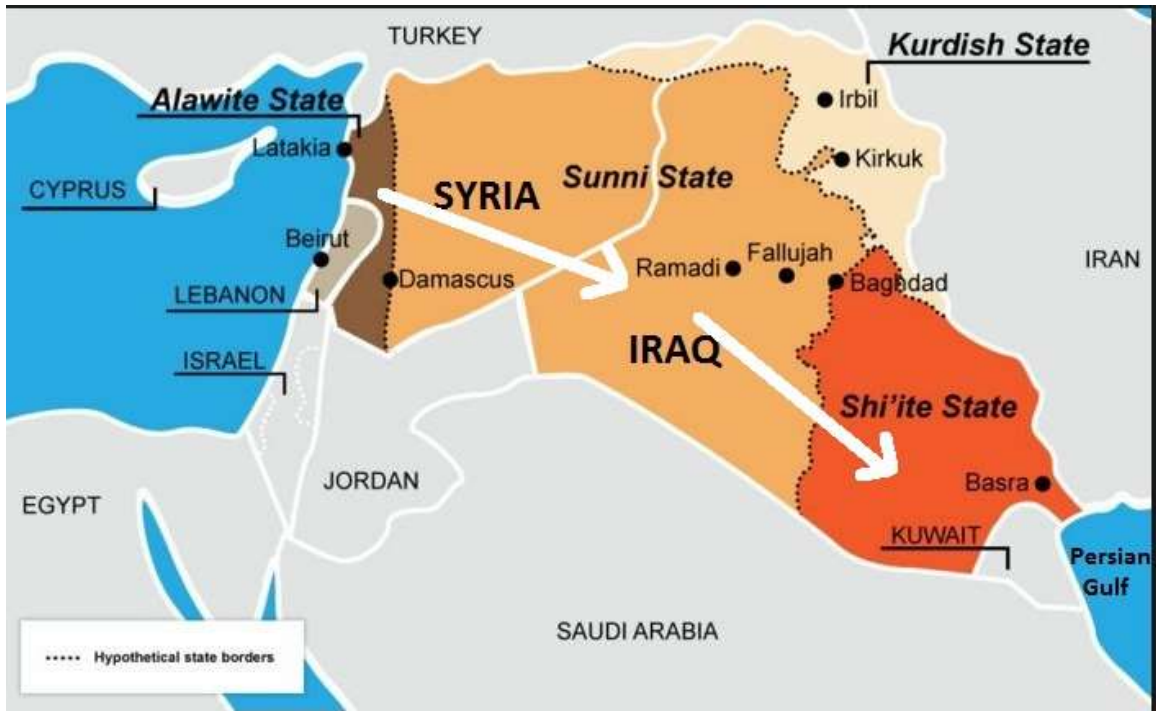
In Syria you also had the Saudis fighting the Turks and the Qataris, because the Turks and the Qataris supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Mohammed Morsi), who was overturned with the blessings of Saudi Arabia and UAE. The Turks and the Qataris were also supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, and the Saudis did not want the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria to have a role in the Syrian opposition. Therefore the Turks and the Saudis were supporting different rebel groups in Syria.

In 2015, with the new Saudi King, Saudi Arabia accepted the Muslim Brotherhood to play a role in the Syrian opposition.

But the whole idea of supporting an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq was a very clever and ruthless plan of Putin and Assad. Islamic revolution and Islamic states are very popular in the Muslim World, and Putin and Assad just used a very common and popular idea to make the Sunni parts of Syria and Iraq forbidden zones for NATO.

Moreover, by uniting the Sunni parts of Syria and Iraq, and making them unreachable to the US with the use of ISIS, Assad and Putin were not only preventing the Americans from coming to Syria, but they were also attacking them at the other end of the road.

Map The Assad-Putin Plan



Obviously Assad and Putin know that at some point in the future they might have to face the Islamic State in Syria. But the Islamic State will not have the support of NATO and it will be easily wiped out by the Russians and the Syrians if they decide to do so at some point. Even if the Turks and the Qataris support ISIS they will not have NATO by their side.

Hilary Clinton wants to send American army in Syria, in order to destroy ISIS, but the Russians will not allow that, because they consider Syria to be under their protection. And obviously the Syrians and the Russians know that if the Americans “clean” Syria from the Jihadists they will be able to build an army which will be friendly to the West, and after that they might “push” the Qatar-Turkey gas pipeline with the support of Turkey and Qatar.

Obviously Putin will not say to Clinton “I do not want you to fight ISIS”, he will say that the Americans have no right to be in Syria.

The last chapter of the story, that is until July 2016, is the new agreement between Putin and Erdogan. They agreed that Putin will give Erdogan the Sunni part of Syria, and Erdogan will give Putin the Turkish Stream Pipeline. See “War or Peace”?

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/07/31/war-and-peace/>

But things change so fast, so let’s wait to see what happens in August 2016.

A great article about how Assad organized the Islamic State is “The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State”, April 2015.

Spiegel is the best political magazine of Europe. It is like the European Newsweek.

For the rise of the Islamic State see also “How Putin and Assad Created the Islamic State”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/07/28/how-putin-and-assad-created-the-islamic-state/>

Articles

“How Putin and Assad Create the Islamic State”

http://iakovosal.blogspot.gr/2016/07/blog-post_78.html

Spiegel: How Assad Created the Islamic State

“The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State”, April 2015

1 , 2, 3

Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi was the real name of the Iraqi, whose bony features were softened by a white beard. But no one knew him by that name. Even his best-known pseudonym, Haji Bakr, wasn't widely known. But that was precisely part of the plan. The former colonel in the intelligence service of Saddam Hussein's air defense force had been secretly pulling the strings at IS for years. Former members of the group had repeatedly mentioned him as one of its leading figures. Still, it was never clear what exactly his role was.

But when the architect of the Islamic State died, he left something behind that he had intended to keep strictly confidential: the blueprint for this state. It is a folder full of handwritten organizational charts, lists and schedules, which describe how a country can be gradually subjugated. SPIEGEL has gained exclusive access to the 31 pages, some consisting of several pages pasted together. They reveal a multilayered composition and directives for action, some already tested and others newly devised for the anarchical situation in Syria's rebel-held territories. In a sense, the documents are the source code of the most successful terrorist army in recent history.

5

For the first time, the Haji Bakr documents now make it possible to reach conclusions on how the IS leadership is organized and what role former officials in the government of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein play in it. Above all, however, they show how the takeover in

northern Syria was planned, making the group's later advances into Iraq possible in the first place. In addition, months of research undertaken by SPIEGEL in Syria, as well as other newly discovered records, exclusive to SPIEGEL, show that Haji Bakr's instructions were carried out meticulously.

8

The story of this collection of documents begins at a time when few had yet heard of the "Islamic State." When Iraqi national Haji Bakr traveled to Syria as part of a tiny advance party in late 2012, he had a seemingly absurd plan: IS would capture as much territory as possible in Syria. Then, using Syria as a beachhead, it would invade Iraq.

21

It seemed as if George Orwell had been the model for this spawn of paranoid surveillance. But it was much simpler than that. Bakr was merely modifying what he had learned in the past: Saddam Hussein's omnipresent security apparatus, in which no one, not even generals in the intelligence service, could be certain they weren't being spied on.

24 , 25 , 26

In 2010, Bakr and a small group of former Iraqi intelligence officers made Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the emir and later "caliph," the official leader of the Islamic State. They reasoned that Baghdadi, an educated cleric, would give the group a religious face.

Bakr was "a nationalist, not an Islamist," says Iraqi journalist Hisham al-Hashimi, as he recalls the former career officer, who was stationed with Hashimi's cousin at the Habbaniya Air Base. "Colonel Samir," as Hashimi calls him, "was highly intelligent, firm and an excellent logistician." But when Paul Bremer, then head of the US occupational authority in Baghdad, "dissolved the army by decree in May 2003, he was bitter and unemployed."

Thousands of well-trained Sunni officers were robbed of their livelihood with the stroke of a pen. In doing so, America created its most bitter and intelligent enemies. Bakr went underground and met Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Anbar Province in western Iraq. Zarqawi, a Jordanian by birth, had previously run a training camp for international terrorist pilgrims in Afghanistan. Starting in 2003, he gained global notoriety as the mastermind of attacks against the United Nations, US troops and Shiite Muslims. He was even too radical for former Al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Zarqawi died in a US air strike in 2006.

28 , 29 , 30

Bakr gradually became one of the military leaders in Iraq, and he was held from 2006 to 2008 in the US military's Camp Bucca and Abu Ghraib Prison. He survived the waves of

arrests and killings by American and Iraqi special units, which threatened the very existence of the IS precursor organization in 2010, Islamic State in Iraq.

For Bakr and a number of former high-ranking officers, this presented an opportunity to seize power in a significantly smaller circle of jihadists. They utilized the time they shared in Camp Bucca to establish a large network of contacts. But the top leaders had already known each other for a long time. Haji Bakr and an additional officer were part of the tiny secret-service unit attached to the anti-aircraft division. Two other IS leaders were from a small community of Sunni Turkmen in the town of Tal Afar. One of them was a high-ranking intelligence officer as well.

In 2010, the idea of trying to defeat Iraqi government forces militarily seemed futile. But a powerful underground organization took shape through acts of terror and protection rackets. When the uprising against the dictatorship of the Assad clan erupted in neighboring Syria, the organization's leaders sensed an opportunity. By late 2012, particularly in the north, the formerly omnipotent government forces had largely been defeated and expelled. Instead, there were now hundreds of local councils and rebel brigades, part of an anarchic mix that no one could keep track of. It was a state of vulnerability that the tightly organized group of ex-officers sought to exploit.

42, 43

True to Haji Bakr's plan, the phase of infiltration was followed by the elimination of every person who might have been a potential leader or opponent. The first person hit was the head of the city council, who was kidnapped in mid-May 2013 by masked men. The next person to disappear was the brother of a prominent novelist. Two days later, the man who had led the group that painted a revolutionary flag on the city walls vanished.

"We had an idea who kidnapped him," one of his friends explains, "but no one dared any longer to do anything." The system of fear began to take hold. Starting in July, first dozens and then hundreds of people disappeared. Sometimes their bodies were found, but they usually disappeared without a trace. In August, the IS military leadership dispatched several cars driven by suicide bombers to the headquarters of the FSA brigade, the "Grandsons of the Prophet," killing dozens of fighters and leading the rest to flee. The other rebels merely looked on. IS leadership had spun a web of secret deals with the brigades so that each thought it was only the others who might be the targets of IS attacks.

47, 48

Until the end of 2013, everything was going according to Islamic State's plan -- or at least according to the plan of Haji Bakr. The caliphate was expanding village by village

without being confronted by unified resistance from Syrian rebels. Indeed, the rebels seemed paralyzed in the face of IS' sinister power.

But when IS henchmen brutally tortured a well-liked rebel leader and doctor to death in December 2013, something unexpected happened. Across the country, Syrian brigades -- both secular and parts of the radical Nusra Front -- joined together to do battle with Islamic State. By attacking IS everywhere at the same time, they were able to rob the Islamists of their tactical advantage -- that of being able to rapidly move units to where they were most urgently needed.

52, 53, 54, 55, 56

Haji Bakr stayed behind in the small city of Tal Rifaat, where IS had long had the upper hand. But when rebels attacked at the end of January 2014, the city became divided within just a few hours. One half remained under IS control while the other was wrested away by one of the local brigades. Haji Bakr was stuck in the wrong half. Furthermore, in order to remain incognito he had refrained from moving into one of the heavily guarded IS military quarters. And so, the godfather of snitching was snitched on by a neighbor. "A Daish sheik lives next door!" the man called. A local commander named Abdelmalik Hadbe and his men drove over to Bakr's house. A woman jerked open the door and said brusquely: "My husband isn't here."

But his car is parked out front, the rebels countered.

At that moment, Haji Bakr appeared at the door in his pajamas. Hadbe ordered him to come with them, whereupon Bakr protested that he wanted to get dressed. No, Hadbe repeated: "Come with us! Immediately!"

Surprisingly nimbly for his age, Bakr jumped back and kicked the door closed, according to two people who witnessed the scene. He then hid under the stairs and yelled: "I have a suicide belt! I'll blow up all of us!" He then came out with a Kalashnikov and began shooting. Hadbe then fired his weapon and killed Bakr.

When the men later learned who they had killed, they searched the house, gathering up computers, passports, mobile phone SIM cards, a GPS device and, most importantly, papers. They didn't find a Koran anywhere.

58

Haji Bakr's state continued to work even without its creator. Just how precisely his plans were implemented -- point by point -- is confirmed by the discovery of another file. When IS was forced to rapidly abandon its headquarters in Aleppo in January 2014, they tried to burn their archive, but they ran into a problem similar to that confronted by the East German secret police 25 years earlier: They had too many files.

63, 64 , 65 , 66, 67, 68, 69

But in the first months of 2014, yet another legacy from Haji Bakr began playing a decisive role: His decade of contacts to Assad's intelligence services.

In 2003, the Damascus regime was panicked that then-US President George W. Bush, after his victory over Saddam Hussein, would have his troops continue into Syria to topple Assad as well. Thus, in the ensuing years, Syrian intelligence officials organized the transfer of thousands of radicals from Libya, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia to al-Qaida in Iraq. Ninety percent of the suicide attackers entered Iraq via the Syrian route. A strange relationship developed between Syrian generals, international jihadists and former Iraqi officers who had been loyal to Saddam -- a joint venture of deadly enemies, who met repeatedly to the west of Damascus.

At the time, the primary aim was to make the lives of the Americans in Iraq hell. Ten years later, Bashar Assad had a different motive to breathe new life into the alliance: He wanted to sell himself to the world as the lesser of several evils. Islamist terror, the more gruesome the better, was too important to leave it up to the terrorists. The regime's relationship with Islamic State is -- just as it was to its predecessor a decade prior -- marked by a completely tactical pragmatism. Both sides are trying to use the other in the assumption that it will emerge as the stronger power, able to defeat the discrete collaborator of yesterday. Conversely, IS leaders had no problem receiving assistance from Assad's air force, despite all of the group's pledges to annihilate the apostate Shiites. Starting in January 2014, Syrian jets would regularly -- and exclusively -- bomb rebel positions and headquarters during battles between IS and rebel groups.

In battles between IS and rebels in January 2014, Assad's jets regularly bombed only rebel positions, while the Islamic State emir ordered his fighters to refrain from shooting at the army. It was an arrangement that left many of the foreign fighters deeply disillusioned; they had imaged jihad differently.

IS threw its entire arsenal at the rebels, sending more suicide bombers into their ranks in just a few weeks than it deployed during the entire previous year against the Syrian army. Thanks in part to additional air strikes, IS was able to reconquer territory that it had briefly lost.

Nothing symbolizes the tactical shifting of alliances more than the fate of the Syrian army's Division 17. The isolated base near Raqqa had been under rebel siege for more than a year. But then, IS units defeated the rebels there and Assad's air force was once again able to use the base for supply flights without fear of attack.

But a half year later, after IS conquered Mosul and took control of a gigantic weapons depot there, the jihadists felt powerful enough to attack their erstwhile helpers. IS

fighters overran Division 17 and slaughtered the soldiers, whom they had only recently protected.

72, 73, 74

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi may be the officially named leader, but it remains unclear how much power he holds. In any case, when an emissary of al-Qaida head Ayman al-Zawahiri contacted the Islamic State, it was Haji Bakr and other intelligence officers, and not al-Baghdadi, whom he approached. Afterwards, the emissary bemoaned "these phony snakes who are betraying the real jihad."

Within IS, there are state structures, bureaucracy and authorities. But there is also a parallel command structure: elite units next to normal troops; additional commanders alongside nominal military head Omar al-Shishani; power brokers who transfer or demote provincial and town emirs or even make them disappear at will. Furthermore, decisions are not, as a rule, made in Shura Councils, nominally the highest decision-making body. Instead, they are being made by the "people who loosen and bind" (ahl al-hall wa-l-aqd), a clandestine circle whose name is taken from the Islam of medieval times.

Islamic State is able to recognize all manner of internal revolts and stifle them. At the same time, the hermitic surveillance structure is also useful for the financial exploitation of its subjects.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html>

The Atlantic: How Iran Created Al-Qaeda of Iraq

“The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi”, August 2006

1 , 2, 3, 4

On a cold and blustery evening in December 1989, Huthaifa Azzam, the teenage son of the legendary Jordanian-Palestinian mujahideen leader Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, went to the airport in Peshawar, Pakistan, to welcome a group of young men. All were new recruits, largely from Jordan, and they had come to fight in a fratricidal civil war in neighboring Afghanistan—an outgrowth of the CIA-financed jihad of the 1980s against the Soviet occupation there.

The men were scruffy, Huthaifa mused as he greeted them, and seemed hardly in battle-ready form. Some had just been released from prison; others were professors and

sheikhs. None of them would prove worth remembering—except for a relatively short, squat man named Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal al-Khalaylah.

He would later rename himself Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Once one of the most wanted men in the world, for whose arrest the United States offered a \$25 million reward, al-Zarqawi was a notoriously enigmatic figure—a man who was everywhere yet nowhere. I went to Jordan earlier this year, three months before he was killed by a U.S. airstrike in early June, to find out who he really was, and to try to understand the role he was playing in the anti-American insurgency in Iraq. I also hoped to get a sense of how his generation—the foreign fighters now waging jihad in Iraq—compare with the foreign fighters who twenty years ago waged jihad in Afghanistan.

9

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, barely forty and barely literate, a Bedouin from the Bani Hassan tribe, was until recently almost unknown outside his native Jordan. Then, on February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell catapulted him onto the world stage. In his address to the United Nations making the case for war in Iraq, Powell identified al-Zarqawi—mistakenly, as it turned out—as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime. Subsequently, al-Zarqawi became a leading figure in the insurgency in Iraq—and in November of last year, he also brought his jihadist revolution back home, as the architect of three lethal hotel bombings in Amman. His notoriety grew with every atrocity he perpetrated, yet Western and Middle Eastern intelligence officials remained bedeviled by a simple question: Who was he? Was he al-Qaeda's point man in Iraq, as the Bush administration argued repeatedly? Or was he, as a retired Israeli intelligence official told me not long ago, a staunch rival of bin Laden's, whose importance the United States exaggerated in order to validate a link between al-Qaeda and pre-war Iraq, and to put a non-Iraqi face on a complex insurgency?

16

Everyone I spoke with readily acknowledged that as a teenager al-Zarqawi had been a bully and a thug, a bootlegger and a heavy drinker, and even, allegedly, a pimp in Zarqa's underworld. He was disruptive, constantly involved in brawls. When he was fifteen (according to his police record, about which I had been briefed in Amman), he participated in a robbery of a relative's home, during which the relative was killed. Two years later, a year shy of graduation, he had dropped out of school. Then, in 1989, at the age of twenty-three, he traveled to Afghanistan.

22, 23, 24

"He was an ordinary guy, an ordinary fighter, and didn't really distinguish himself," Huthaifa Azzam said of al-Zarqawi's first time in Afghanistan. "He was a quiet guy who

didn't talk much. But he was brave. Zarqawi doesn't know the meaning of fear. He's been wounded five or six times in Afghanistan and Iraq. He seems to intentionally place himself in the middle of the most dangerous situations. He fought in the battles of Khost and Kardez and, in April 1992, witnessed the liberation of Kabul by the mujahideen. A lot of Arabs were great commanders during those years. Zarqawi was not. He also wasn't very religious during that time. In fact, he'd only 'returned' to Islam three months before coming to Afghanistan. It was the Tablighi Jamaat [a proselytizing missionary group spread across the Muslim world] who convinced him—he had thirty-seven criminal cases against him by then—that it was time to cleanse himself.”

A Jordanian counterterrorism official expanded on al-Zarqawi's time in Afghanistan for me. “His second time in Afghanistan was far more important than the first. But the first was significant in two ways. Zarqawi was young and impressionable; he'd never been out of Jordan before, and now, for the first time, he was interacting with doctrinaire Islamists from across the Muslim world, most of them brought to Afghanistan by the CIA. It was also his first exposure to al-Qaeda. He didn't meet bin Laden, of course, but he trained in one of his and Abdullah Azzam's camps: the Sada camp near the Afghan border inside Pakistan. He trained under Abu Hafis al-Masri.” (The reference was to the nom de guerre of Mohammed Atef, an Egyptian who was bin Laden's military chief and, until he was killed in an American air strike in Afghanistan in November 2001, the No. 3 official in al-Qaeda.)

Abu Muntassir Bilal Muhammad is another jihadist who spent time fighting in Afghanistan and who would later become one of the co-founders of al-Zarqawi's first militant Islamist group. “Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan as a zero,” he told me, “a man with no career, just floundering about. He trained and fought and he came back to Jordan with ambitions and dreams: to carry the ideology of jihad. His first ambition was to reform Jordan, to set up an Islamist state. And there was a cachet involved in fighting in the jihad. Zarqawi returned to Jordan with newfound respect. It's not so much what Zarqawi did in the jihad—it's what the jihad did for him.”

26

But perhaps as important as anything else, it was in Afghanistan that al-Zarqawi was introduced to Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (whose real name is Isam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi), a revered and militant Salafist cleric who had moved to Zarqa following the mass expulsion of Palestinians from Kuwait in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The Salafiya movement originated in Egypt, at the end of the nineteenth century, as a modernist Sunni reform movement, the aim of which was to let the Muslim world rise to the challenges posed by Western science and political thought. But since the 1920s, it has

*evolved into a severely puritanical school of absolutist thought that is markedly anti-Western and based on a literal interpretation of the Koran. Today's most radical Salafists regard any departure from their own rigid principles of Islam to be heretical; their particular hatred of Shiites—who broke with the Sunnis in 632 A.D. over the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, and who now constitute the majority in Iran and Iraq—is visceral. Over the years, al-Maqdisi embraced the most extreme school of Salafism, closely akin to the puritanical Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia, and in the early 1980s he published *The Creed of Abraham*, the single most important source of teachings for Salafist movements around the world. Al-Maqdisi would become al-Zarqawi's ideological mentor and most profound influence.*

28, 29

Al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi left Afghanistan in 1993 and returned to Jordan. They found it much changed. In their absence the Jordanians and the Israelis had begun negotiations that would lead to the signing of a peace treaty in 1994; the Palestinians had signed the Oslo Accords of 1993; and the Iraqis had lost the Gulf War. Unemployment was up sharply, the result of a privatization drive agreed to with the International Monetary Fund, and Jordanians were frustrated and angry. The Muslim Brotherhood—the kingdom's only viable opposition political force, which had agreed to support King Hussein in exchange for being allowed to participate in public and parliamentary life—appeared unable to cope with the rising disaffection. Small underground Islamist groups had therefore begun to appear, composed largely of men who had fought in the Afghan jihad, and who were guided by the increasingly loud voices of militant clerics who felt the Muslim Brotherhood had been co-opted by the state.

After the two men returned home, al-Maqdisi toured the kingdom, preaching and recruiting, and al-Zarqawi sought out Abu Muntassir, who had already acquired a standing among Islamic militants in Jordan. "We talked a lot, over a couple of days," Abu Muntassir told me. "He was still pretty much a novice, but very willing, very able, and keen to learn about Islam. I was teaching geography at the time in a government school, so it was easy for me to teach Islam as well. After some time, Zarqawi asked me to work with him in an Islamic group; al-Maqdisi was already on board. The idea was there, but it had no leadership and no name. First we called it al-Tawhid, then changed the name to Bayat al-Imam [Allegiance to the Imam]. We were small but enthusiastic—a dozen or so men. Our primary objective, of course, was to overthrow the monarchy and establish an Islamic government."

31, 32 , 33

In another botched operation, al-Maqdisi (according to court testimony that he denied) gave al-Zarqawi seven grenades he had smuggled into Jordan, and al-Zarqawi hid them in the cellar of his family's home. Al-Maqdisi was already under surveillance by Jordan's intelligence service by that time, because of his growing popularity. The grenades were quickly discovered, and the two men, along with a number of their followers, found themselves for the first time before a state security court. Al-Zarqawi told the court that he had found the grenades while walking down the street. The judges were not amused. They convicted him and al-Maqdisi of possessing illegal weapons and belonging to a banned organization. In 1994, al-Zarqawi was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. He would flourish there.

Swaqa prison sits on the southern desert's edge, sixty miles south of Amman, and its political prisoners, both Islamist and secular, are housed in four wings. Al-Zarqawi embraced prison life in the extreme—as he appears to have embraced everything. According to fellow inmates of his with whom I spoke, his primary obsessions were recruiting other prisoners to his cause, building his body, and, under the tutelage of al-Maqdisi, memorizing the 6,236 verses of the Koran. He was stern, tough, and unrelenting on anything that he considered to be an infraction of his rules, yet he was often seen in the prison courtyard crying as he read the Koran.

He was fastidious about his appearance in prison—his beard and moustache were always cosmetically groomed—and he wore only Afghan dress: the shalwar kameez and a rolled-brim, woolen Pashtun cap. One former inmate who served time with him told me that al-Zarqawi sauntered through the prison ward like a “peacock.” Islamists flocked to him. He attracted recruits; some joined him out of fascination, others out of curiosity, and still others out of fear. In a short time, he had organized prison life at Swaqa like a gang leader.

36

When Abu Rumman entered Swaqa, al-Zarqawi was in isolation following a prison brawl. “It was quite extraordinary,” Abu Rumman said. “My first glimpse of Zarqawi was when he was released. He returned to the ward as a hero surrounded by his own bodyguards. Everyone began to shout: Allahu Akhbar! By that time Zarqawi was already called the ‘emir,’ or ‘prince.’ He had an uncanny ability to control, almost to hypnotize; he could order his followers to do things just by moving his eyes.”

41, 42, 43

In 1998, three or four of al-Zarqawi's tracts were posted on the Internet, after heavy editing. Soon they came to the attention of Osama bin Laden, in Afghanistan. It was the first time he had ever heard of al-Zarqawi.

In May of the following year, Jordan's King Abdullah II—newly enthroned after the death of his father, King Hussein—declared a general amnesty, and al-Zarqawi was released from Swaqa. He had made effective use of his time there. As he had done nearly a decade before—when he befriended wealthy Saudi jihadists in Khost—he had expanded his reach and his appeal during his prison years. Among the fellow inmates he had converted to Salafism and brought into the Bayat al-Imam were a substantial number of prisoners from Iraq.

After returning for a few months to Zarqa, al-Zarqawi left again and traveled to Pakistan. He may or may not have known that Jordan was about to declare him a suspect in a series of foiled terrorist attacks intended for New Year's Eve of 1999. The plan, which became known as the "Millennium Plot," involved the bombing of Christian landmarks and other tourist sites, along with the Radisson Hotel in Amman. Had it succeeded, it would have been al-Zarqawi's first involvement in a major terrorist attack.

45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51

In December 1999, al-Zarqawi crossed the border into Afghanistan, and later that month he and bin Laden met at the Government Guest House in the southern city of Kandahar, the de facto capital of the ruling Taliban. As they sat facing each other across the receiving room, a former Israeli intelligence official told me, "it was loathing at first sight."

According to several different accounts of the meeting, bin Laden distrusted and disliked al-Zarqawi immediately. He suspected that the group of Jordanian prisoners with whom al-Zarqawi had been granted amnesty earlier in the year had been infiltrated by Jordanian intelligence; something similar had occurred not long before with a Jordanian jihadist cell that had come to Afghanistan. Bin Laden also disliked al-Zarqawi's swagger and the green tattoos on his left hand, which he reportedly considered un-Islamic. Al-Zarqawi came across to bin Laden as aggressively ambitious, abrasive, and overbearing. His hatred of Shiites also seemed to bin Laden to be potentially divisive—which, of course, it was. (Bin Laden's mother, to whom he remains close, is a Shiite, from the Alawites of Syria.)

Al-Zarqawi would not recant, even in the presence of the legendary head of al-Qaeda. "Shiites should be executed," he reportedly declared. He also took exception to bin Laden's providing Arab fighters to the Taliban, the fundamentalist student militia that, although now in power, was still battling the Northern Alliance, which controlled some 10 percent of Afghanistan. Muslim killing Muslim was un-Islamic, al-Zarqawi is reported to have said.

Unaccustomed to such direct criticism, the leader of al-Qaeda was aghast.

Had Saif al-Adel—now bin Laden’s military chief—not intervened, history might be written very differently.

A former Egyptian army colonel who had trained in special operations, al-Adel was then al-Qaeda’s chief of security and a prominent voice in an emerging debate gripping the militant Islamist world. Who should the primary target be—the “near enemy” (the Muslim world’s “un-Islamic” regimes) or the “far enemy” (primarily Israel and the United States)? Al-Zarqawi was a near-enemy advocate, and although his obsession remained the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy, he had expanded his horizons slightly during his prison years and had now begun to focus on the area known as al-Sham, or the Levant, which includes Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and historic Palestine. As an Egyptian who had attempted to overthrow his own country’s army-backed regime, al-Adel saw merit in al-Zarqawi’s views. Thus, after a good deal of debate within al-Qaeda, it was agreed that al-Zarqawi would be given \$5,000 or so in “seed money” to set up his own training camp outside the western Afghan city of Herat, near the Iranian border. It was about as far away as he could be from bin Laden.

Saif al-Adel was designated the middleman.

In early 2000, with a dozen or so followers who had arrived from Peshawar and Amman, al-Zarqawi set out for the western desert encircling Herat. His goal: to build an army that he could export to anywhere in the world. Al-Adel paid monthly visits to al-Zarqawi’s training camp; later, on his Web site, he would write that he was amazed at what he saw there. The number of al-Zarqawi’s fighters multiplied from dozens to hundreds during the following year, and by the time the forces evacuated their camp, prior to the U.S. air strikes of October 2001, the fighters and their families numbered some 2,000 to 3,000. According to al-Adel, the wives of al-Zarqawi’s followers served lavish Levantine cuisine in the camp.

It was in Herat that al-Zarqawi formed the militant organization Jund al-Sham, or Soldiers of the Levant. His key operational lieutenants were mainly Syrians—most of whom had fought in the Afghan jihad, and many of whom belonged to their country’s banned Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood’s exiled leadership, which is largely based in Europe, was immensely important in recruiting for the Herat camp, although whether it also supplied funds remains under debate. What is clear, however, is that al-Zarqawi’s closest aide, a Syrian from the city of Hama named Sulayman Khalid Darwish—or Abu al-Ghadiyah—was considered to be, until his death last summer on the Iraqi-Syrian frontier, one of al-Zarqawi’s most likely successors.

53, 54 ,55, 56, 57, 58, 59

At least five times, in 2000 and 2001, bin Laden called al-Zarqawi to come to Kandahar and pay bayat—take an oath of allegiance—to him. Each time, al-Zarqawi refused. Under no circumstances did he want to become involved in the battle between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. He also did not believe that either bin Laden or the Taliban was serious enough about jihad.

When the United States launched its air war inside Afghanistan, on October 7, 2001, al-Zarqawi joined forces with al-Qaeda and the Taliban for the first time. He and his Jund al-Sham fought in and around Herat and Kandahar. Al-Zarqawi was wounded in an American air strike—not in the leg, as U.S. officials claimed for two years, but in the chest, when the ceiling of the building in which he was operating collapsed on him. Neither did he join Osama bin Laden in the eastern mountains of Tora Bora, as U.S. officials have also said. Bin Laden took only his most trusted fighters to Tora Bora, and al-Zarqawi was not one of them.

In December 2001, accompanied by some 300 fighters from Jund al-Sham, al-Zarqawi left Afghanistan once again, and entered Iran.

During the next fourteen months, al-Zarqawi based himself primarily in Iran and in the autonomous area of Kurdistan, in northern Iraq, traveling from time to time to Syria and to the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp in the south of Lebanon—a camp that, according to the former Jordanian intelligence official, became his main recruiting ground. More often, however, al-Zarqawi traveled to the Sunni Triangle of Iraq. He expanded his network, recruited and trained new fighters, and set up bases, safe houses, and military training camps. In Iran, he was reunited with Saif al-Adel—who encouraged him to go to Iraq and provided contacts there—and for a time, al-Zarqawi stayed at a farm belonging to the fiercely anti-American Afghan jihad leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar. In Kurdistan he lived and worked with the separatist militant Islamist group Ansar al-Islam, ironically in an area protected as part of the “no-fly” zone imposed on Saddam Hussein by Washington.

One can only imagine how astonished al-Zarqawi must have been when Colin Powell named him as the crucial link between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein’s regime. He was not even officially a part of al-Qaeda, and ever since he had left Afghanistan, his links had been not to Iraq but to Iran.

“We know Zarqawi better than he knows himself,” the high-level Jordanian intelligence official said. “And I can assure you that he never had any links to Saddam. Iran is quite a different matter. The Iranians have a policy: they want to control Iraq. And part of this policy has been to support Zarqawi, tactically but not strategically.”

“In the beginning they gave him automatic weapons, uniforms, military equipment, when he was with the army of Ansar al-Islam. Now they essentially just turn a blind eye to his activities, and to those of al-Qaeda generally. The Iranians see Iraq as a fight against the Americans, and overall, they’ll get rid of Zarqawi and all of his people once the Americans are out.”

In the summer of 2003, three months after the American invasion, al-Zarqawi moved to the Sunni areas of Iraq. He became infamous almost at once. On August 7, he allegedly carried out a car-bomb attack at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad. Twelve days later, he was linked to the bombing of the United Nations headquarters, in which twenty-two people died. And on August 29, in what was then the deadliest attack of the war, he engineered the killing of over a hundred people, including a revered cleric, the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, in a car bombing outside Shia Islam’s holy shrine in Najaf. The suicide bomber in that attack was Yassin Jarad, from Zarqa. He was al-Zarqawi’s father-in-law.

63

Of course, no one did more to cultivate that image than al-Zarqawi himself. He committed some of the deadliest attacks in Iraq, though they still represent only some 10 percent of the country’s total number of attacks. In May 2004, he inaugurated his notorious wave of hostage beheadings; he also specialized in suicide and truck bombings of Shiite shrines and mosques, largely in Shiite neighborhoods. His primary aim was to provoke a civil war. “If we succeed in dragging [the Shia] into a sectarian war,” he purportedly wrote in a letter intercepted by U.S. forces and released in February 2004, “this will awaken the sleepy Sunnis who are fearful of destruction and death at the hands of the Shia.” (The authenticity of the letter came into question almost immediately.)

65, 66, 67, 68 ,69

Regardless of his growing notoriety in Iraq, al-Zarqawi never lost sight of his ultimate goal: the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy. His efforts to foment unrest in Jordan included the 2002 assassination of the U.S. diplomat Lawrence Foley, and, on a far larger scale, a disrupted plot in 2004 to bomb the headquarters of the Jordanian intelligence services—a scheme that, according to Jordanian officials, would have entailed the use of trucks packed with enough chemicals and explosives to kill some 80,000 people. Once it was uncovered, al-Zarqawi immediately accepted responsibility for the plot, although he denied that chemical weapons would have been involved.

Later that year, in October 2004, after resisting for nearly five years, al-Zarqawi finally paid bayat to Osama bin Laden—but only after eight months of often stormy negotiations. After doing so he proclaimed himself to be the “Emir of al-Qaeda’s Operations in

the Land of Mesopotamia,” a title that subordinated him to bin Laden but at the same time placed him firmly on the global stage. One explanation for this coming together of these two former antagonists was simple: al-Zarqawi profited from the al-Qaeda franchise, and bin Laden needed a presence in Iraq. Another explanation is more complex: bin Laden laid claim to al-Zarqawi in the hopes of forestalling his emergence as the single most important terrorist figure in the world, and al-Zarqawi accepted bin Laden’s endorsement to augment his credibility and to strengthen his grip on the Iraqi tribes. Both explanations are true.

“From the beginning, Zarqawi has wanted to be independent, and he will continue to be,” Oraib Rantawi, the director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies in Amman, said to me. “Yes, he’s gained stature through this alliance, but he only swore bayat after all this time because of growing pressure from Iraqis who were members of al-Qaeda. And even then he signed with conditions—that he would maintain control over Jund al-Sham and al-Tawhid, and that he would exert operational autonomy. His suicide bombings of the hotels in Amman”—in which some sixty civilians died, many of them while attending a wedding celebration—“was a huge tactical mistake. My understanding is that bin Laden was furious about it.”

The attacks, which represented an expansion of al-Zarqawi’s sophistication and reach, also showed his growing independence from the al-Qaeda chief. They came only thirteen months after he had sworn bayat. The alliance had already begun to fray.

The signs were visible as early as the summer of 2005. In a letter purportedly sent to al-Zarqawi in July from Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian surgeon who is bin Laden’s designated heir, al-Zarqawi was chided about his tactics in Iraq. And although some experts have cast doubt on the letter’s authenticity (it was released by the office of the U.S. Director of National Intelligence), few would dispute its message: namely, that al-Zarqawi’s hostage beheadings, his mass slaughter of Shiites, and his assaults on their mosques were all having a negative effect on Muslim opinion—both of him and, by extension, of al-Qaeda—around the world. In one admonition, al-Zawahiri allegedly advised al-Zarqawi that a captive can be killed as easily by a bullet as by a knife.

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“Not at all,” he replied. “Zarqawi had the ambition to become what he has, but whatever happens, even if he becomes the most popular figure in Iraq, he can never go against the symbolism that bin Laden represents. If Zarqawi is captured or killed tomorrow, the Iraqi insurgency will go on. There is no such thing as ‘Zarqawism.’ What Zarqawi is will die with him. Bin Laden, on the other hand, is an ideological thinker. He created the concept of al-Qaeda and all of its offshoots. He feels he’s achieved his goal.” He paused for a

moment, then said, "Osama bin Laden is like Karl Marx. Both created an ideology. Marxism still flourished well after Marx's death. And whether bin Laden is killed, or simply dies of natural causes, al-Qaedaism will survive him."

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/>

Qatar is trying to convince al-Nusra to cut ties with Al-Qaeda and start cooperating with Qatar in order to jointly fight Assad and ISIS

"Syria's Nusra Front may leave Qaeda to form new entity", March 2015

Leaders of Syria's Nusra Front are considering cutting their links with al Qaeda to form a new entity backed by some Gulf states trying to topple President Bashar al-Assad, sources said.

Sources within and close to Nusra said that Qatar, which enjoys good relations with the group, is encouraging the group to go ahead with the move, which would give Nusra a boost in funding.

The exercise could transform Nusra from a weakened militia group into a force capable of taking on Islamic State at a time when it is under pressure from bombing raids and advances by Kurdish and Iraqi military forces.

It could also boost the influence of Qatar and its allies in the campaign to oust Assad, in line with the Gulf state's growing diplomatic ambitions in the region. Qatari officials were not available for comment.

While it awaits the final word from its decision-making Shoura council, Nusra is not wasting time. It has turned on small non-jihadi groups, seizing their territory and forcing them to disarm so as to consolidate Nusra's power in northern Syria and pave the way for the new group.

Intelligence officials from Gulf states including Qatar have met the leader of Nusra, Abu Mohamad al-Golani, several times in the past few months to encourage him to abandon al Qaeda and to discuss what support they could provide, the sources said.

They promised funding once it happens.

"A new entity will see the light soon, which will include Nusra and Jaysh al Muhajereen wel Ansar and other small brigades," said Muzamjer al-Sham, a prominent jihadi figure who is close to Nusra and other Islamist groups in Syria.

"The name of Nusra will be abandoned. It will disengage from al Qaeda. But not all the Nusra emirs agree and that is why the announcement has been delayed," said Sham.

A source close to the foreign ministry confirmed that Qatar wanted Nusra to become a purely Syrian force not linked to al Qaeda.

"They are promising Nusra more support, i.e. money, supplies etc, once they let go of the Qaeda ties," the official said.

The Qatari-led bid to rebrand Nusra and to provide it with new support could further complicate the war in Syria as the United States prepares to arm and train non-jihadist rebels to fight Islamic State.

The Nusra Front is listed as a terrorist group by the United States and has been sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. But for Qatar at least, rebranding Nusra would remove legal obstacles to supporting it.

FIGHTING ISLAMIC STATE

One of the goals of the new entity would be to fight Islamic State, Nusra's main competitor in Syria. IS is led by Iraqi jihadi Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who helped create Nusra before falling out with Golani.

Once the most powerful group fighting Assad, Nusra was weakened when most of its commanders and fighters left with Baghdadi to form Islamic State. IS then killed many of Nusra's remaining leaders, confiscated its weapons, forced its commanders to go underground and seized its territory.

But recently Islamic State has come under pressure from air strikes by a U.S.-led coalition. It has also lost ground to Kurdish fighters in Syria and to the Iraqi armed forces. But the group is far from collapse.

But if Nusra splits from al Qaeda, some hope that with proper funding, arming and training, fighters from the new group will be able to tackle Islamic State.

Jihadi sources said that Golani suggested to the group's Shoura Council that it should merge with Jaysh al-Muhajereen wel Ansar, a smaller jihadi group composed of local and foreign fighters and led by a Chechen commander.

The announcement has been delayed due to objections from some of Nusra's leaders who reject the idea of leaving al Qaeda. But this was seen as unlikely to stop Golani.

"He is going to do it, he does not have a choice. Those who are not happy can leave," said a Nusra source who backs the move.

It seems Golani is already establishing the ground.

Nusra wants to use northern Syria as base for the new group. It launched offensives against Western-backed groups who have been vetted by the U.S. to receive military support.

In the northern province of Idlib it seized territory from the Syria Revolutionaries' Front led by Jamal Maarouf, forcing him to flee. Last week it went after another mainstream group, Harakat Hazzm in Aleppo province, forcing it to dissolve itself.

The U.S. State Department said the end of Harakat Hazzm would have an impact on the moderate opposition's capabilities in the north.

But if Nusra is dissolved and it abandons al Qaeda, the ideology of the new entity is not expected to change. Golani fought with al Qaeda in Iraq. Some other leaders fought in Afghanistan and are close al Qaeda chief Ayman Zawahri.

"Nusra had to pledge loyalty to Sheikh Zawahri to avoid being forced to be loyal to Baghdadi but that was not a good idea, it is time that this is abandoned," said a Nusra source in Aleppo. "It did not help Nusra and now it is on the terrorist list," he said.

(Reporting by Mariam Karouny; additional reporting by Amena Bakr in Doha; Editing by Giles Elgood)

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-nusra-insight-idUKKBN0M00G620150304>

Al-Nusra cut ties with Al-Qaeda officially and rebrands itself

“It looks like Al Qaeda is 'laying a trap' for the US — and giving Russia exactly what it wants”, July 2016

Al Qaeda's former affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, formally severed ties with the global terrorist organization Thursday in an attempt to "unify" as a distinct Islamist brigade with its own revolutionary goals and vision.

In its mission to rebrand itself, al-Nusra — now identifying as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham — has clearly indicated that it is not committed to Al Qaeda's brand of global jihad but to the singular goal of fomenting an Islamic revolution inside Syria.

The break was made easier by the fact that, since its emergence in 2012, Nusra has woven itself into the fabric of Syria's communities and established military alliances of convenience with many mainstream rebel groups in the name of toppling Syrian president Bashar Assad.

But it also confirms that Nusra has no intention of distancing itself from the revolution's non-jihadist rebel groups, many of whom are backed by the US and its allies.

For Russia, then — which has consistently used Nusra's presence among these more moderate rebel groups as an excuse to target and eliminate any and all opposition to its ally, Assad — Nusra's dissolution of ties with Al Qaeda is a gift. For the US, it's a headache.

"By dissolving its ties with Al Qaeda, Nusra Front has made certain that it will remain deeply embedded within opposition front lines, particularly in the northern governorates of Aleppo and Idlib," Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute who is an expert on Syria's jihadist insurgency, wrote in Foreign Policy on Friday.

He continued:

"Any airstrikes by foreign states targeting the group will almost certainly result in the deaths of mainstream opposition fighters and be perceived on the ground as counterrevolutionary. Consequently, a mission defined by Moscow and Washington in counterterrorism terms would in all likelihood steadily broaden the spectrum of those potentially defined as 'terrorists' — to the substantial detriment of any future solution to the Syrian crisis."

The break comes just as the US and Russia are preparing to announce a military cooperation plan, known as the Joint Implementation Group, that was meant to more clearly delineate Nusra's positions in Syria and deter airstrikes on civilians and the more moderate opposition.

"By disavowing its ties to Al Qaeda — which, incidentally, it did with Al Qaeda's blessing — Nusra has made it harder to isolate it from more moderate groups, some of whose

members may join it now because it's more powerful than some of the groups they belong to now," a US official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Jeff White, a military expert and defense fellow at The Washington Institute, said the development would probably not have any effect on Russia's military strategy in Syria.

"Russia doesn't bomb Nusra because it's a terrorist group," White told Business Insider. "It bombs Nusra because it is an enemy — an effective one — of the regime. For Russia, as long as Nusra keeps fighting the regime, it will remain a target."

As for how the break might affect the US's military strategy in Syria, White said that while the Obama administration would "want to assess what the split means in terms of goals, objectives, and operations, I suspect the counterterrorism community will be loath to take it off the target list."

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Thursday that Nusra's rebranding would not affect the US's assessment of the group.

"There continues to be increasing concern about Nusra Front's growing capacity for external operations that could threaten both the United States and Europe," Earnest told reporters at the daily White House press briefing.

But the development is bound to further complicate Syria's rebel landscape, especially as Nusra — under its new name — mainstreams itself and consequently attracts more young men to its cause.

That, Lister noted, is where Nusra's break from Al Qaeda can be seen less as a conscious separation from the terrorist organization's global jihadist ideals and more as a way of "laying a trap" for the US and its allies who claim to want to support the goals of Syria's revolution.

"The most moderate FSA groups will be forced to choose between military and revolutionary unity, or operational isolation and subjugation," Lister wrote. "In short, Jabhat al-Nusra is taking yet another step toward shaping the orientation of the Syrian opposition in its favor."

Many experts claimed that the US and Russia sealed Al Qaeda's fate in Syria after it was revealed that they were going to coordinate their respective air campaigns to target its affiliate, al-Nusra.

Now, by breaking ties with Al Qaeda, Nusra has all but cemented the conditions for its own long-term survival. Those include increased popular support — which will lead to a backlash against the West if the US targets the group — and, potentially, funding from Qatar and Turkey, which may interpret Nusra's rebranding as a legitimization of its revolutionary goals.

"Placed in this quandary, international military action against Jabhat al-Nusra does seem all but inevitable," Lister said. "At the same time, however, the consequences for doing so have become even more concerning."

<http://www.businessinsider.com/al-nusra-qaeda-syria-us-russia-2016-7>

General Petraeus, former CIA director says that maybe America has to cooperate with moderate Al-Qaeda fighters i.e. Al-Nusra

“David Petraeus' bright idea: give terrorists weapons to beat terrorists”, September 2015

1

The latest brilliant plan to curtail Isis in the Middle East? Give more weapons to current members of al-Qaida. The Daily Beast reported that former CIA director David Petraeus, still somehow entrenched in the DC Beltway power circles despite leaking highly classified secrets, is now advocating arming members of the al-Nusra Front in Syria, an offshoot of al-Qaida and a designated terrorist organization. Could there be a more dangerous and crazy idea?

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/02/david-petraeus-bright-idea-give-terrorists-weapons-to-beat-isis>

The Americans and the Iraqi government did not want Turkey to take part in the fight against ISIS in Mosul.

“Why Turkish military isn't welcome in Syria, Iraq”, June 2016

9, 10, 11, 12

"Turkey's singularly pro-Sunni policies and support for the Muslim Brotherhood has long since been noted by the US which — like Baghdad — does not want any active Turkish participation in the push to liberate Mosul because of concerns that Turkish soldiers will refuse to leave the area when asked to do so," Baburoglu said.

Baghdad is still calling for Turkish troops deployed in the Bashiqa camp near Mosul against Iraq's wishes to be withdrawn. Washington has also called for these troops to be withdrawn but Turkey has refused to do so, thus fueling suspicions about Turkish intentions in Iraq.

A Western diplomatic source who wished to remain anonymous due to his sensitive position told Al-Monitor that mistrust of Ankara's aims has turned Turkey in the eyes of many of its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies into a complicating rather than supporting factor in the fight against IS in Iraq and Syria.

Ankara remains locked on Bashar al-Assad's ouster, on preventing Kurds from gaining territory or political clout in northern Syria and on bolstering the position of minority Sunnis in Iraq even as it is losing on all three fronts.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/turkey-military-is-not-happy-with-foreign-policy.html>

What Iran owes ISIS and what ISIS owes Iran

“What ISIS Owes Iran, and Vice-Versa”

Perhaps the world's most infamous terrorist movement—the Islamic State of Iran and Syria (ISIS), owes something to the world's foremost state-sponsor of terrorism—the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet, most major media outlets have failed to note the complex history between theocratic, Shi'ite-ruled Iran and the Sunni group describing itself as the Islamic State. Instead, coverage has often fixated on sectarian differences and the simple narrative that Shi'ite Iran is fighting Sunni ISIS. This omits the important role that Iranian mullahs and their policies have played in providing support—originally direct but now indirect in the wake of open conflict—to the Islamic State.

Currently ISIS is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, but the group's origins can be traced to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born terrorist who founded Tawhid wal-Jihad

(“Monotheism and Jihad”). The Tawhid wal-Jihad terror cell eventually expanded into the Islamic State's progenitor—al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

*After fleeing Afghanistan following the arrival of U.S.-led coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, Zarqawi was “based in Iran and northern Iraq” for “about a year.” After a brief arrest by Iranian authorities, he was allowed to “move freely” throughout the region to recruit, according to Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan in their book *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. The authors assert that according to Jordanian intelligence services, “it wasn't Baghdad America should have been looking at [for links to Zarqawi's group] ...it was Tehran.” (pg. 17)*

“The Iranians have a policy: they want to control Iraq. And part of this policy has been to support Zarqawi, tactically but not strategically....In the beginning they gave him weapons, uniforms, military equipment, when he was with the army of Ansar al-Islam [a Sunni terror group based in northern Iraq]. Now they essentially just turn a blind eye to his activities, and to those of al-Qaeda generally.”

*Somewhat prophetically, a Jordanian official stated, “The Iranians see Iraq as a fight against the Americans, and overall, they'll get rid of Zarqawi and all of his people once the Americans are out.” (pg.18) (“The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,” July 2006, *The Atlantic*)*

Shi'ite Iran supporting Sunni terrorists

Support from Shi'ite Iran for non-Shi'ite terror groups is hardly unprecedented: Tehran has a history of strategically supporting Sunni terrorists that share the Islamic Republic's objectives of attacking Israel (such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad) or those who attack the “far enemy” of the United States, such as al-Qaeda. Followers of Osama bin Laden sought and received sanctuary in Iran after fleeing Afghanistan following the U.S.-invasion in response to al-Qaeda's Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks.

After receiving Iranian support, al-Zarqawi eventually would turn to sectarian warfare in Iraq, targeting Shi'ite holy places and murdering members of that Islamic sect. Long-dominated by Sunni members of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party, post-U.S.

invasion Iraq saw the rise of Shiite officials. While this better reflected the country's demography, it also provided both an opportunity for Tehran to project its influence and concurrently for al-Zarqawi to exploit Sunni fears of being shut out. As Weiss and Hassan observe, the election of Shiite Iraqi officials—some of whom had lived in Iran prior to the U.S. occupation—allowed al-Zarqawi to exploit an “incipient but real problem in Iraq's political evolution...the creeping takeover by chauvinistic Shia politicians, many of whom were spies or agents of influence of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).” (pg. 29)

Following al-Zarqawi's death in a 2006 U.S.-drone strike, the subsequent U.S.-led surge of forces and the so-called “Anbar-Awakening”—in which Iraqi Sunni tribes rejected the brutality of AQI in favor of U.S.-provided security, Sunni extremist terror groups briefly receded in key provinces. Yet, with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq—comprised of many former AQI terrorists—“ISIS has couched its current campaign in Syria and Iraq in exactly” the same sectarian terms as al-Zarqawi used. Meanwhile, the movement hopes to spur Sunni recruitment by targeting Shi'ites and prompting a fierce counterreaction.

Atrocities committed in Syria's civil war by Tehran-backed Shi'ite militias and U.S.-listed terror organizations like the Quds (Jerusalem) Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and Kata'ib Hezbollah among others provided considerable help to ISIS in recruiting disenfranchised Sunnis.

In May 2011, Quds Force head Qassem Suleimani was sanctioned by the United States for “complicity...in the human rights abuses and repression of the Syrian people.” As Weiss and Hassan note, Suleimani used the head of Tehran's Badr Corps and Iraqi Transportation Minister, Hadi al-Amiri, to funnel weapons to Syria's General Intelligence Directorate—munitions often used in documented human rights abuses, including the targeting of civilian populations. The extensive level of Iranian involvement in Syria has also been noted by former Syrian Prime Minister Riyad Hijab who—after defecting in August 2012—declared: “Syria is occupied by the Iranian regime. The person who runs the country is not Bashar al-Assad [Syria's President] but Qassem Soleimani.” (pg. 139)

National Defense Forces in Syria—groups trained and often led by IRGC commanders—have been accused by Human Rights Watch of singling out Sunnis for attacks in Syrian towns of al-Bayda and Baniyas. As the Wall Street Journal has noted (“Syria's Alawite Force Turned Tide for Assad,” Aug. 26 2013), National Defense Force trainees are “told that the war in Syria is akin to epic battle for Shiite Islam, and if they die they will be martyrs of the highest rank.”

From torture and mockery to mockery and torture

These forces—and those of the Iranian supported dictator himself Bashar al-Assad—stand accused of “a broad array of torture against their captives, including pipe beatings, whippings, electrocutions, acid burns, fingernail extractions.” According to Shiraz Maher, an expert on radicalization at Kings College: “It was physical torture mixed with a campaign to mock the core aspects of Sunni belief. That's what caught the attention and anger.....This is why the foreign fighter trend started from the Gulf and North Africa.” (pg. 135)

To be sure, corruption and wanton human rights abuses of the Sunni-dominated Ba'athist regimes of the Assad family in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq have played an undeniable role in fomenting Islamist groups of both sects—Sunni and Shiite. So did the pro-Shi'ite policies of former Iraq Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki which were exploited by jihadi terror groups. Other papers have also noted blowback from the Assad regime's funding and funneling of anti-coalition terrorist fighters into Iraq and elsewhere as well as connections of ousted Iraqi Ba-athist leaders connectionsto ISIS. (“Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State,” April 18 2015, Der Spiegel)

This is to say nothing of the ideology of the Islamic State, which overlap at its crudest with that of the Islamic Republic in sanctioning of the murders of Muslim apostates, Jews, homosexuals and repeated calls for the destruction of the United States.

The rise and growth of the Islamic State—beginning with the foundations of AQI and associated terror groups—would be hard to imagine without the initial Iranian-provided

weapons, funds, and sanctuary for its founding father or the steady stream of Sunni recruits reacting to the rhetoric of sectarian holy war mouthed by Iranian-backed clerics. Such rhetoric, along with the anti-Sunni brutality of Iranian terror groups and Iranian-trained militias, has helped boost the Islamic State numbers in Syria and Iraq.

In May 2014, amidst battles between Iranian militias and ISIS and a break between ISIS and al-Qaeda, ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani noted in a message to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri that their organization had not attacked Iran since its founding. Further, despite enduring allegations of collaboration with the Islamic Republic, the group had “refrained from targeting it” acting “upon the orders of al-Qaeda to safeguard its interests and supply lines in Iran.” The Islamic State spokesman proclaimed, “let history record that Iran owes al-Qaeda invaluable.” (pg. 18-19)

It may also be said that the Islamic State owes the first Islamic Republic “invaluable”—and that people in the region and those in the West are paying immeasurably. Public understanding would be much better served by news media coverage that goes beyond the simplified narrative of Shi’ite Iran fighting the Sunni Islamic State.

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_print=1&x_context=7&x_issue=94&x_article=3080

Washington Institute: Qataris Giving Donations to ISIS

“Qatar and ISIS Funding: The U.S. Approach”, August 2014

1 to 4

America views its close ally, Qatar, as a terrorist funding trouble spot. Washington has gone so far as to call the small Persian Gulf state a permissive environment for financing terrorist groups.

The United States says it does not have evidence that the government of Qatar is funding the terrorist group now known as the Islamic State (ISIS). But it does believe that private individuals in Qatar are helping to finance this group and others like it. And it thinks the Gulf state is not doing enough to stop this.

To influence Qatar's policies, the United States has employed a carrot-and-stick approach. It heaps praise on its ally for developing new anti-terrorist financing

regulations, while privately discouraging and sometimes publicly admonishing its support for terrorist organizations.

Yet the fundamental problem is that America's counterterrorism agenda sometimes conflicts with what Qatar perceives to be its own political interests. Qatar's security strategy has been to provide support to a wide range of regional and international groups in order to bolster its position at home and abroad. This strategy has involved generously supporting Islamist organizations, including militant ones like Hamas and the Taliban. Allowing private local fundraising for Islamist groups abroad forms part of this approach. Closing channels of support to militant Islamists -- i.e., what Washington would like Doha to do -- would be inimical to Qatar's basic approach to its own security.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/qatar-and-isis-funding-the-u.s.-approach>

National Interest: The Americans think that Iran will help them fight ISIS but the truth is Iran wants ISIS weak but not defeated

“Sorry, America: Iran Won't Defeat ISIS for You”, July 2015

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

ISIS's persistence has led some analysts to conclude—most recently Harvard's Stephen Walt—that ISIS's “state” will be a long-term reality in the region and one that Washington may soon have to come to terms with. From developing its own currency to managing a system of governance and terror wrapped in ideological fervidity, the Islamic State certainly has shown its resilience, despite its morphing geography since it captured Mosul in the summer of 2014.

Since the finalizing of the Iranian nuclear agreement, Iran has been touted in Washington in some policy circles as the best partner in fighting ISIS. Potential common interests between Washington and Tehran—as well as Iran's military capabilities—could make Tehran an effective ally in rolling back ISIS at a time when the United States is wary to commit to another ground war in the Middle East. This assessment has three substantial blind spots:

First, Tehran's strategy in Syria and Iraq has been focused more on containing and managing ISIS than defeating it. This strategy is driven by different considerations in both countries. In Syria, ISIS is seen as an effective tool in both weakening the U.S.- and GCC-backed opposition militias and buttressing the argument that President Assad is a most amenable alternative in Syria. Iraq, on the other hand, presents a difficult balancing act for Tehran that consists of both managing ISIS as a security threat to Iran's heartland and Iraq's Shi'a communities and avoiding empowering Sunni communities to such a degree that they could later pose a credible challenge to Iran's influence in the Iraqi state. Tehran will prefer to keep Iraq unstable until its dominant influence is assured. Iran has been less than effective in pursuing this strategy as evidenced by its recent poor performance in Al Anbar Province and its difficult recapture of Tikrit in the spring.

Second, the best partners in defeating ISIS are Sunni Arab states and communities. ISIS's resilience in the region has been sustained both by the effective use of military tactics and organizational strategy, but also, by a deepening ideological resonance amongst disenfranchised Sunnis in communities worldwide from Afghanistan to the banlieues of Paris. Without a sustained buy-in from leading Sunni states on both the governmental level and on the civil-society level to counter ISIS's ideology, the Islamic State will continue to be a feature in the region's body politic. As a senior Gulf official once noted, the responsibility of defeating ISIS isn't an American or Iranian responsibility, but the responsibility of the Muslim community worldwide to reject this violence.

Third, Iran's endgames in Iraq and Syria are in complete contrast to the United States' objectives. While Washington and Tehran may share a few common interests in weakening ISIS, Tehran is seeking to both push the United States out of the region and to curtail the influence of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. A political solution in Syria or Iraq, which gives the United States and the GCC a further foothold in these states, would be an outcome that Iran would vigorously oppose.

Washington policymakers should be wary, then, of embracing Iran as such a partner as it considers recalibrating U.S. strategy in countering ISIS.

<http://nationalinterest.org/blog/sorry-america-iran-wont-defeat-is-is-you-13407>

The Atlantic: Assad's air force is covering ISIS

“Bashar al-Assad and the Devil's Endgame”, September 2015

2, 3, 4, 5

Assad's plan, it seems, is to deliberately aid the rise of ISIS—what I call the devil's gambit. The logic is simple and ruthless: radicalize the opposition so that the Syrian dictator looks like a lesser evil to domestic and foreign audiences. Here, Assad benefits from the inherently polarizing nature of civil war, as a cycle of atrocities and revenge pushes all sides to the extreme. He has further spurred radicalization by focusing the regime's fire on moderate enemies, while reportedly releasing jihadists from jail and purchasing oil from ISIS. In recent months, the Syrian military allegedly used air strikes to help ISIS advance toward the city of Aleppo. Khaled Khoja, a Syrian opposition leader, claimed that Assad's fighter jets were acting as “an air force for ISIS.”

In the widening gyre, the center cannot hold. Back in 2011, the relatively moderate Free Syrian Army seemed a plausible candidate to lead the resistance against Assad. Now the leading rebel factions include ISIS, the Islamic Front, and the al-Nusra Front, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda. The U.S. effort to train a moderate Syrian force has proved to be a pitiful and quixotic quest. After 10 months and millions of dollars, the United States has created a rebel army that is five strong. Not 5,000 strong, or 5 percent of the opposition. But literally five guys—barely enough to run a burger joint.

The tyrant and the terrorists have a symbiotic relationship. While ISIS rails against the secular regime, its focus is on building the caliphate, not getting rid of Assad. Meanwhile, ISIS's advance in Iraq in 2014 was a godsend for the Syrian regime. The insurgents headed away from Damascus. And the group's capture of the city of Mosul and much of Anbar province terrified the West. A reluctant Barack Obama could not accept the fall of Baghdad, and authorized extensive air strikes against ISIS.

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For both Western countries and Assad's Alawite constituency at home, the choice is stark: the devil you know, or a pack of rapacious demons. If Assad were to fall, the chief beneficiary would be the very Islamist forces that the United States is bombing. To be reminded of the dangers of toppling a dictator, U.S. officials need only look to Libya, where the overthrow of Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011 led to anarchy. Assad is the TINA candidate: There is no alternative.

The devil's gambit, then, appears to have succeeded. The Obama administration has recently backed away from insisting that Assad must relinquish power, and signaled instead that the dictator could stay in power for a transitional period as part of a peace settlement.

But the key word here is "appears." As with the pact between the Nazis and the Soviets in 1939, the partners in Syria's dance of death will happily stab each other when the moment is opportune.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/assad-syria-devil-endgame-putin-obama/407635/>

The Atlantic: Assad helps ISIS up to the point it does not become very strong.

"Bashar al-Assad and the Devil's Gambit", July 2014

10, 11, 12

For Assad, ISIS is priceless. The Sunni extremist boogeyman holds the key to his political survival. As ISIS continues its assault in Iraq, employing tactics that include beheadings, crucifixions, and systematic torture, Assad has cemented his alliance with Baghdad, as well as with Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia.

Even Assad's enemies are rethinking their strategy. European countries worry about the thousands of Europeans who have traveled to Syria to fight Assad—and their potential

return as violent militants. Meanwhile, the United States has dispatched hundreds of advisors to join the battle against ISIS in Iraq. Members of the Obama administration are backing away from the goal of toppling Assad. “Anyone calling for regime change in Syria,” said one official, “is frankly blind to the past decade; and the collapse of eastern Syria, and growth of Jihadistan, leading to 30 to 50 suicide attacks a month in Iraq.”

The devil’s gambit is a chancy maneuver, since the resulting radicals could grow too powerful to control. For a dictator, the sweet spot is an extremist force that’s strong enough to inspire fear abroad, but not capable enough to topple the regime—which is roughly where ISIS is right now. If the militants become too potent, Assad will probably turn on them with a vengeance.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/assad-and-the-art-of-the-devils-gambit/374501/>

Telegraph: In 2011 Assad freed the jailed Sunni Jihadists from the Syrian prisons and gave them the oilfields of Sunni Syria and started buying their oil.

“As long as there is an Assad, there will be an Isil - he'll make sure of it”,

December 2015

2, 3

So it is with Bashar al-Assad in Syria. From the very beginning of his country’s insurrection, Assad has done his best to help Islamist zealots hijack the Syrian opposition; he worked particularly hard to create ideal laboratory conditions for the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil). His supremely cynical aim was to convince the West to accept him as an essential bulwark against the very threat he helped to conjure into being. Put bluntly, Assad is an arsonist posing as a fireman.

This is an old trick. Every Arab dictator since Nasser has sought to confront his people and the world with a stark choice: either support me or watch the jihadists take over. The ruse is obvious, time-honoured – and remarkably effective.

6, 7, 8, 9, 10

So for as long as there is an Assad, there will be an Isil. He will make sure of it. Why? Because for as long as there is an Isil, some in the West will argue that we need Assad to defeat it.

*The conclusion should be obvious: the man who needs Isil more than anyone else is not best qualified to cause their demise. Assad's role in engineering Isil's ascendancy is well-documented. Back in 2011 and 2012, he emptied Sednaya prison outside Damascus of its most dangerous Islamist prisoners. He must have known that these outlaws would use their liberty to infect the rebels with the jihadist virus – and they duly did so. An excellent book, *Isis: Inside the Army of Terror* by Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, names three Isil commanders who were carefully released from Assad's jails.*

Helped by the talent that the dictator had set free, Isil captured the oilfields of eastern Syria in 2013. But there is no point possessing oil unless you can sell the stuff. Fortunately for Isil, Assad bought their oil and funded their advance.

Today, Syria's regime remains the largest single buyer of Isil's oil and one of the biggest donors to the terrorists' coffers. These facts are not seriously disputed, indeed the businessman accused of negotiating the oil deals between Isil and Assad – one George Haswani, the owner of HESCO engineering – has been named and subjected to EU sanctions.

Meanwhile, observers of the war have noticed a pattern. Assad strains every sinew to fight the non-Islamist rebels, but Isil has generally been immune from his barrel bombs and poison gas. Last year, only six per cent of Assad's military operations targeted Isil, according to a study by IHS Jane's, a defence consultancy. The other rebels felt the fury of 94 per cent of Assad's military effort.

12

There is a bitter irony here. Without the threat posed by Assad's forces and Russian air power, many Sunni rebels in Syria would indeed take up arms against Isil. The way to turn them against Isil would be to stop the depredations of Assad. So the idea that the dictator is indispensable to the fight against Isil is the exact reverse of the truth. In fact, getting rid of Assad would be the key that unlocks a Sunni army to defeat the terrorists.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12038032/As-long-as-there-is-an-Assad-there-will-be-an-Isil-hell-make-sure-of-it.html>

“How Assad helped the rise of his 'foe' Isil”, August 2014

2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Logic would suggest that Mr Assad and Isil are out to destroy one another. But logic works in curious ways in the Middle East. As he wages a ruthless struggle to hold power, the evidence suggests that Mr Assad has quietly cooperated with his supposed enemies and actively helped their rise.

The thinking behind this apparently perverse strategy is simple. Mr Assad wants to force his own people and the West to make an unpalatable choice: either he stays in place, or Syria falls into the hands of Isil's fanatics. When push comes to shove, Mr Assad thinks that most Syrians and the Western powers will back him over the fundamentalists.

But this plan will only work if Isil is the most powerful rebel force. The signs are that Mr Assad has done his best to make this come true.

As recently as 2012, Isil was a marginalised movement confined to a small area of Iraq. Then Mr Assad emptied Sednaya jail near Damascus of some of its most dangerous jihadist prisoners. If he hoped that these men would join Isil and strengthen its leadership, then that aspiration was certainly fulfilled. A number of figures in the movement's hierarchy are believed to be former inmates of Syrian prisons, carefully released by the regime.

By 2013, Isil had managed to capture oilfields in eastern Syria. But to profit from these assets, they needed to find a customer for the oil. Mr Assad's regime stepped in and began buying oil from Isil, thereby helping to fund the movement, according to Western and Middle Eastern governments.

Having provided Isil with talented commanders, courtesy of his prison amnesties, and filled its coffers with oil money, Mr Assad then chose to focus his military campaign on the non-Islamist rebels. Every town and suburb held by the Free Syrian Army was relentlessly pounded from the air and ground. A year ago, the regime even used poison gas against insurgent strongholds in Damascus.

The signs are that Isil has returned the favour. Instead of trying to bring down Mr Assad, Isil has concentrated on fighting the non-Islamist rebels. When the movement reached what may prove to be the apex of its military strength earlier this year, Isil did not advance on Damascus and try to overthrow the regime. Instead, it chose to invade northern Iraq and trigger the current crisis.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11051566/Ho-w-Assad-helped-the-rise-of-his-foe-Isil.html>

A Russian businessman with connections to Putin was buying ISIS oil

“An Energy Mogul Becomes Entangled With Islamic State”, May 2016

1, 2

In Syria, George Haswani sees himself as a patriot. In the West, he is a wanted man.

Mr. Haswani acts as a middleman between Islamic State and the Syrian government, the terror group’s largest customer, Western security officials allege. Islamic State controls much of Syria’s energy infrastructure and sells stolen oil and natural gas at a discount—even to the regime it is ostensibly battling.

7, 8

Buttressing Mr. Hawsani are his strong ties to Russia. He teamed up years ago with one of President Vladimir Putin’s closest associates to build the sprawling gas-production facility in Syria’s Tuweinan region that caught the attention of the Obama administration.

Administration officials said Moscow’s military and economic alliance with Damascus makes it clear Russia knows of the dealings between the Assad regime and Islamic State.

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Mr. Haswani built the Tuweinan gas facility in partnership with a company owned by Gennady Timchenko, a Russian businessman and confidante of Mr. Putin’s. Mr. Timchenko’s firm, OAO Stroytransgaz, has provided Russian engineers for the project over the past decade, the company said.

35

The U.S. has long accused Mr. Timchenko of serving as a front for the business interests of Mr. Putin, particularly in energy. Mr. Timchenko declined to comment. He has said in the past that he was a self-made businessman, independent of the Russian leader.

37

“Timchenko’s activities in the energy sector have been directly linked to Putin,” the Treasury Department said at the time.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/an-energy-mogul-becomes-entangled-with-is-lamic-state-1462734922>

Time: Assad is afraid of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Al-Nusra and not ISIS. ISIS never really threatened Assad.

“Why Bashar Assad Won’t Fight ISIS”, February 2015

2

The regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad has long had a pragmatic approach to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), says a Syrian businessman with close ties to the government. Even from the early days the regime purchased fuel from ISIS-controlled oil facilities, and it has maintained that relationship throughout the conflict. “Honestly speaking, the regime has always had dealings with ISIS, out of necessity.”

7, 8, 9, 10

Assad does not see ISIS as his primary problem, the businessman says. “The regime fears the Free Syrian Army and the Nusra Front, not ISIS. They [the FSA and Nusra] state their goal is to remove the President. But ISIS doesn’t say that. They have never directly threatened Damascus.” As the businessman notes, the strikes on ISIS targets are minimal. “If the regime were serious about getting rid of ISIS, they would have bombed Raqqa by now. Instead they bomb other cities, where the FSA is strong.” That said, the businessman does not believe that the regime has a formal relationship with ISIS, just a pragmatic one. “The more powerful ISIS grows, the more they are useful for the regime.

They make America nervous, and the Americans in turn see the regime as a kind of bulwark against ISIS.”

A senior Western diplomat who specializes in the Syrian civil war agrees that ISIS is seen as an asset by Assad. “They will do whatever it takes to devalue the opposition, even if it means strengthening ISIS. They know that if it comes to choosing between the black flag [of ISIS] and Damascus, the international community will choose Damascus.” And the strategy has worked extremely well. “The way it’s going now, it’s a matter of months, not even a year, that the moderate opposition is so weakened that it won’t be a factor anymore. So in just a few months from now the regime will be able to achieve its strategic goal of forcing the world to choose between Damascus and the black flags.”

So by ignoring the conflict between the Syrian opposition and the Assad regime to focus purely on ISIS may solve problems in the short term, says the diplomat, “but there will be more problems to come. These are the ingredients for a further escalation of the conflict — alienating large parts of the Sunni population, so that they have no choice but to join ISIS. Not for ideological reasons, but because they will do whatever it takes to overthrow the regime in Damascus.” Not only that, it will widen the geographical boundaries of the conflict by making this a fight of all Sunnis. “It’s a clear recipe for further escalation well beyond the geographical boundaries of the current conflict.”

However, Damascus believes that once it has neutralized most of the opposition, it can then defeat ISIS with ease. “ISIS alone, the regime can deal with them. What Assad wants is international recognition of his legitimacy as Syria’s President,” says the businessman. “When the war is over, he can easily handle ISIS with the help of Hizballah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.”

<http://time.com/3719129/assad-isis-asset/>

“It looks like Al Qaeda is 'laying a trap' for the US — and giving Russia exactly what it wants”, July 2016

1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Al Qaeda's former affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, formally severed ties with the global terrorist organization Thursday in an attempt to "unify" as a distinct Islamist brigade with its own revolutionary goals and vision.

In its mission to rebrand itself, al-Nusra — now identifying as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham — has clearly indicated that it is not committed to Al Qaeda's brand of global jihad but to the singular goal of fomenting an Islamic revolution inside Syria.

The break was made easier by the fact that, since its emergence in 2012, Nusra has woven itself into the fabric of Syria's communities and established military alliances of convenience with many mainstream rebel groups in the name of toppling Syrian president Bashar Assad.

But it also confirms that Nusra has no intention of distancing itself from the revolution's non-jihadist rebel groups, many of whom are backed by the US and its allies.

For Russia, then — which has consistently used Nusra's presence among these more moderate rebel groups as an excuse to target and eliminate any and all opposition to its ally, Assad — Nusra's dissolution of ties with Al Qaeda is a gift. For the US, it's a headache.

"By dissolving its ties with Al Qaeda, Nusra Front has made certain that it will remain deeply embedded within opposition front lines, particularly in the northern governorates of Aleppo and Idlib," Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute who is an expert on Syria's jihadist insurgency, wrote in Foreign Policy on Friday.

He continued:

"Any airstrikes by foreign states targeting the group will almost certainly result in the deaths of mainstream opposition fighters and be perceived on the ground as counterrevolutionary. Consequently, a mission defined by Moscow and Washington in counterterrorism terms would in all likelihood steadily broaden the spectrum of those potentially defined as 'terrorists' — to the substantial detriment of any future solution to the Syrian crisis."

The break comes just as the US and Russia are preparing to announce a military cooperation plan, known as the Joint Implementation Group, that was meant to more clearly delineate Nusra's positions in Syria and deter airstrikes on civilians and the more moderate opposition.

"By disavowing its ties to Al Qaeda — which, incidentally, it did with Al Qaeda's blessing — Nusra has made it harder to isolate it from more moderate groups, some of whose members may join it now because it's more powerful than some of the groups they belong to now," a US official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Jeff White, a military expert and defense fellow at The Washington Institute, said the development would probably not have any effect on Russia's military strategy in Syria.

"Russia doesn't bomb Nusra because it's a terrorist group," White told Business Insider. "It bombs Nusra because it is an enemy — an effective one — of the regime. For Russia, as long as Nusra keeps fighting the regime, it will remain a target."

As for how the break might affect the US's military strategy in Syria, White said that while the Obama administration would "want to assess what the split means in terms of goals, objectives, and operations, I suspect the counterterrorism community will be loath to take it off the target list."

White House press secretary Josh Earnest said Thursday that Nusra's rebranding would not affect the US's assessment of the group.

"There continues to be increasing concern about Nusra Front's growing capacity for external operations that could threaten both the United States and Europe," Earnest told reporters at the daily White House press briefing.

But the development is bound to further complicate Syria's rebel landscape, especially as Nusra — under its new name — mainstreams itself and consequently attracts more young men to its cause.

That, Lister noted, is where Nusra's break from Al Qaeda can be seen less as a conscious separation from the terrorist organization's global jihadist ideals and more as a way of "laying a trap" for the US and its allies who claim to want to support the goals of Syria's revolution.

"The most moderate FSA groups will be forced to choose between military and revolutionary unity, or operational isolation and subjugation," Lister wrote. "In short, Jabhat al-Nusra is taking yet another step toward shaping the orientation of the Syrian opposition in its favor."

Many experts claimed that the US and Russia sealed Al Qaeda's fate in Syria after it was revealed that they were going to coordinate their respective air campaigns to target its affiliate, al-Nusra.

Now, by breaking ties with Al Qaeda, Nusra has all but cemented the conditions for its own long-term survival. Those include increased popular support — which will lead to a backlash against the West if the US targets the group — and, potentially, funding from Qatar and Turkey, which may interpret Nusra's rebranding as a legitimization of its revolutionary goals.

"Placed in this quandary, international military action against Jabhat al-Nusra does seem all but inevitable," Lister said. "At the same time, however, the consequences for doing so have become even more concerning."

<http://www.businessinsider.com/al-nusra-qaeda-syria-us-russia-2016-7>

“Ankara's oil business with ISIS”, March 2016

<https://www.rt.com/business/323391-isis-oil-business-turkey-russia/>