

World War “O” : Strike Syria and Ignite Iraq

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This incisive article was first published three years ago in September 2013. It focuses on the process leading up to Obama's air campaign allegedly against ISIS initiated in September 2014. The title reveals what is now an ongoing process of destroying both Iraq and Syria as nation states.

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If the Obama Administration orders the US military to attack Syria, Iraq will burst into flames overnight. Several Iraqi groups have declared that they would attack US interests inside Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East in retaliation.

Violence in Iraq has intensified as a result of the US-led covert war on Syria. This has made the Iraqi government very eager to see an end to the fighting in the neighboring country. When it comes to its position on the Syrian conflict, Iraq is in the same camp as Russia, Iran, and China. Baghdad firmly supports Russian, Iranian, and Chinese calls for a negotiated settlement, and is opposed to any ideas of a US attack on Syria.

The Militia Factor

A US strike on Syria will not only see Syrian retaliation. There will be a regional response against a US attack that will include Iraq.

While Mohammed Javad Zarif, the foreign minister of Iran [image below], has denied that Tehran will target American interest in Iraq, he has warned that a US attack on Syria will not be able to contain the violent consequences.

Iran may not intervene directly inside Iraq to attack the interests of the US, as Foreign Minister Zarif emphasized during a press conference in Baghdad he held with his Iraqi counterpart, but this does not mean that the Iraqi groups allied to Iran will not attack US interests inside Iraq.



Mohammed Javad Zarif, the foreign minister of Iran (Reuters)

Iraqi militias like Asayib Ahl Al-Haq have openly warned that they will retaliate against the United States.

If the US attacks Syria, then Iraq cannot avoid being drawn into the conflict. Even if the Iraqi government declared itself neutral, in one way or another Iraq will be drawn into a war against the United States. American officials are aware of this too. *The Wall Street Journal* has even reported that US officials have said that the US Embassy in Baghdad was a potential target if a US attack on Syria takes place.

Overtly emphasizing the Iranian connection, the Associated Press had this to report on the repercussions that the US would face inside Iraq from an attack on Syria: *"Iranian-backed Shiite militias are threatening to retaliate against American interests inside Iraq if the United States goes ahead with strikes against the Tehran-allied government in Syria, according to Iraqi security officials and militants themselves."*

The Threat to Oil Production

The Iraqi militias will attack the major business interests of the United States inside Iraq. American oil interests inside Iraq are especially vulnerable. What this essentially translates to in the vernacular is *"kiss your sweet oil goodbye, Yankees."*

Reuters has reported that American oil companies are under close watch by the militias inside Iraq and that Exxon has moved *"most of its workforce from the southern West Qurna-1 oilfield project to Dubai until tensions ease."*

The operations of Exxon Mobil and the Anglo-American oil giant BP will both come under attack in Iraq and be paralyzed. If US allies such as Britain get involved, then they too can expect their companies, like the Anglo-Dutch Royal Dutch Shell, to be attacked and paralyzed.



Reuters / Atef Hassan

The Regional Chain of Resistance

The mainstream media in the US, Western Europe, and the Arab petro-sheikhdoms are quick to point to an Iranian connection with the militias in Iraq, whereas the Shiite Muslim nature of these militias has provided an opportunity for the mouthpieces of the Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf to demonize and slander the Shiites as a threat to the Middle East.

These mouthpieces are essentially running a smear campaign about a Shiite Muslim conspiracy. The London-based *Al-Hayat* newspaper, a tool of Saudi propaganda owned by Prince Khaled bin Sultan, has alleged that these Shiite militias are getting ready for a sectarian regional war that will see them eventually go to fight in not only Syria, but also in Bahrain and Yemen.

An Iraqi retaliation against the US goes beyond Iranian influence. The Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr, who does not always see things eye to eye with Iran, promised twice with high fanfare in 2006 — once during a visit in Tehran and a second time while in Damascus—that his forces would help either Syria or Iran in any possible future wars against the US. The Iraqi cleric even emphasized that the US, the UK, and Israel were the common enemies of Syria and Iraq and working to divide the people of both countries. Even though Sadr has decided to distance himself from the events in Syria and has disagreements with Tehran, many of his followers are supportive of Damascus.

The bottom line is that Iraqis will use the opportunity of a Pentagon strike on Syria to retaliate against the US in sympathy and solidarity with Syrians. Moreover, some of these militias, including the one controlled by Moqtada Sadr, fought as resistance movements against the US and UK forces occupying Iraq. This has cultivated a sense of commitment to any regional project that opposes and resists the US and its allies. This has fixed these Iraqi groups to the Resistance Bloc that includes Syria.



Iraq, Baghdad (Reuters / Ahmed Saad)

While the misleading reports about the plans of these Iraqi militias to create a network to act regionally are mostly propaganda, the anticipation of a regional war in the Middle East is not. An attack on Syria will not be contained within Syrian borders. It will escalate regionally in the Middle East and even develop into a global conflict outside of the Middle East's borders.

Beyond Syria and Iraq...

If it decided to attack Syria, the US would literally be putting a match to a powder keg in the Middle East. Iraq would just be the start. The whole neighborhood would eventually catch fire.

Aside from taking extra security measure in Iraq, the US government has asked many of its diplomatic staff to leave the US Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. The US has also urged American citizens to leave Lebanon, because Lebanon will almost automatically be drawn into an American conflict with Syria. Hezbollah and other Lebanese groups are allied to Syria and will support Damascus against the US and its allies.

Turkey and Israel, both major cheerleaders of a US-led attack will certainly get involved. Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan has even foolishly declared that Turkey will join the US in any military action without thinking of the consequence for Turkey, as if the fighting in Kurdistan or the instability on the border has not been enough for him and the AKP. Faisal Mekdad, the deputy foreign minister of Syria, has also warned that his country will militarily retaliate against Israel, Jordan, and Turkey in response to an American attack against Syria.

Syria does not stand alone either. It has many friends and allies around the world. Russia, Iran, and China, Syria's three most powerful backers, form a formidable opposition to the US and its allies.



Maalula, a historic Christian town near Damascus, Syria (AFP Photo)

For the sake of diplomacy, the Iranian government, Syria's staunchest ally, has avoided making any direct threats against the US and prevented its military commanders from making any aggressive statements that could aggravate the situation after President Obama announced his plans to strike Syria. Tehran, however, would become involved in the conflict. Together with Syria, the involvement of Iran, Hezbollah, various Palestinian groups, and their Iraqi allies would turn the entire region from the Eastern Mediterranean to NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan into a giant conflict zone.

If American oil corporations are expecting disruption in Iraq as a result of an American attack on Syria, then they should be aware that expansion of the conflict would disrupt global oil supplies. Economically, the entire world will feel the pain generated from such a conflict. The prices of oil and gas will go up. This will lead to higher fuel, transportation, and production prices that will raise costs in almost every sector. Airfare, public transportation, food products, industrial goods, heating, and shipping prices will become greater as a result.

Then there is the reaction of Moscow, Syria's other big strategic partner, which has to be considered by the United States. President Putin has made it extremely clear that the Russian Federation will support Damascus if the US does attack it directly. The US cannot ignore the Russian naval presence off the Syrian coast or Russia's military capabilities. If the situation escalates, the Russian naval armada in the Mediterranean could assist Syria.

The Chinese have even sent a warship as an indicator of where they stand.

No wonder there is a popular campaign in the US against the war in Syria that in its satirical message asks Americans to support Obama *"kickstart World War III"* by attacking Syria.

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