

Iranian-Affiliated Militias in Syria (3) ... Their Influence on the Region and Future Analytical Paper Summary

Iran prepared to confront the fallout of the Arab spring revolts in Syria, and intervened, since its first days, to oppress the Syrian revolution in order to protect its ally in the Assad regime and take advantage of the popular mobilization as a justification to greatly solidify its influence in Syria. It then later, as the events changed from a peaceful movement to an armed one, changed strategies to legitimize its military presence, taking advantage of the excuse of fighting “terrorist organizations.”

Through the course of the past eight years, Iran gained many strategic gains which made it into a regional power with influence in the region’s political balances, especially given its possessing of a wide network of leaders, fighters, resources and weapons which spread from the Mediterranean to Afghanistan, which makes the possibility of targeting or weakening it extremely difficult.

This paper tried in part one to study the effect of the presence of these militias and great number of fighters from different countries on Syrians, seeing as they are the important actors and the most harmed. These militias aided the Assad regime in deciding battles on the ground, even though it hid from the decision-making process and instead took up positions inside the regime’s security and military wings.

However, Iran on the other hand influenced the part of the populace loyal to Assad, as the presence of these militias was a factor influencing the economic, political and military stability of Syria, in addition to its social effect and

security practices which created a situation of discontent among civilians. This was in addition to its targeting of populace supporting the oppositions and committing many war crimes, massacres and forced displacements.

The paper tried in its second part to study the effect of these militias presence on the states interested in the Syrian issue, such as Iran, Russia, Turkey and the United States of America, as Iran-despite what it has incurred as expenses-has appeared to be the biggest benefactor from that number of fighters, especially after their conflict experience in Syria which helped in strengthening their ability to lead trans-border conflicts, and created for them a bigger political role in the Syrian issue, and enabled them to draw a map of alliances in the region and strengthen their social, political and economic influence in the “Shia crescent” countries.

From another perspective, the presence of these militias had positive and negative effects on Russia, as it invested in the presence of these militias as a negotiating card, which enabled them to hold deals and agreements with both America and Israel. However, they also created a number of challenges, whether in terms of the balance of Russian-Iranian power in Syria, or in terms of containing the Iranian presence and reduce the possibility of an outbreak of military escalation between Iran and Israel.

As for America, the experience of Iran and its militias in Syria was a means to economically and militarily drain Iran, and also enabled America to extort Iran and put pressure on it to make gains in other political issues. It however also raised the degree of the Iranian challenge to American interests in the region, which pushed the latter to increase its pressure and sanctions.

As for Turkey, it transformed the Iranian-affiliated militias in Syria into a tool to put pressure that allowed Iran invest in Turkey's influence and its relationship with the Syrian opposition factions to achieve field and political gains, as it also transformed these militias into a tool to reduce Turkey's influence in the region and target its military interests.

The effect of those militias was not limited to the countries interested in the Syrian issue, but also extended to be a challenge to other neighboring countries, as these militias and their military bases presence in the south of Syria, also caused renewed military clashes with Israel. This was also a security concern for the northern regions of Jordan, and raised the possibility of shelling or a new wave of displacement, in addition to an increase in the level of security threat of the illegitimate activities that these militias practice in the region.

As for Israel, the presence of these militias increased its security fears, especially with their establishing military and weapons manufacturing bases in sensitive areas, which forced Israel to execute hundreds of strikes yearly, with the aim of the Iranian military wings, and put pressure on Russia to push Iran and its militias far from its southern border to avoid the copying of another "Hezbollah" this time on the Syrian side.

As for Iraq, it saw the participation of the "Popular Mobilization" militias in Syria, which increased their economic, political and military, and even social, influence in Iraq, as it came to be able to establish more dominance over the other political components and influence the Iraqi political decision in favor of Iranian interests. This also applies to Lebanon which also saw an increase in

Hezbollah's influence in Syria and increased its domination of other Lebanese sides, and transformed it from being a local militia to one with regional extent that hijacked the Lebanese national will to the interest of Iran.

From another perspective, the presence of these numbers of fighters in Syria had repercussions on the region as a whole, and especially the Gulf countries, as these transnational forces became a tool to threaten regional security, thorough which Iran was able to further internal conflicts and invest in to extort countries in other political issues.

As for the relationship between Iranian-affiliated militias and some terrorist groups such as Daesh, the paper tried to compare between the influence of the two, and study the bilateral relations and similarities and shared dangers of both, and foresee the possibility of investing of one in the other in order to achieve more gains on the ground.

The paper also tried to draw the characteristics of these militias in Syria through presenting a group of general scenarios and expected particular scenarios, as the occurrence of these scenarios is greatly connected to the current regional and international balances, which could create a change in the opportunities of new scenarios.

These scenarios were divided between the "model" scenario which accompanied the international visions for the formation of a political solution, which centered on the complete exit of these militias, and the scenario which is more likely, which is a copying of the "Popular Mobilization" experience, and focused on the shared characteristics between the experience of the popular mobilization force in Iraq and the practice of those militias in Syria, in addition

to a third scenario centered around the possibility of the current situation continuing for a long time, and transformation of those militias as a tool to disrupt internal stability or a tool for proxy wars. It also presented the factors which increase the possibility of each of the past scenarios of coming to fruition or the obstacles it could face and the accompanying effects whether now or in the long run.

The paper concluded with a number of recommendations addressed to Syrians from different political perspectives, whether politicians, activists or from the general populace, through which they could benefit from previous experiences and avoid repeated mistakes and make their stabilization and integration into Syrian society easier.