



"The Other Narrative":

Israel and the Civil War in Syria, Hezbollah's Version

By: Dr. Michael Barak and Dr. Nir Boms

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The civil war in Syria - the one into which Hezbollah was drawn almost from its first day - presented a multi-systemic challenge for an organization that was forced not only to endanger its soldiers on a distant front, but also to explain to its supporters why it chose to do so. In this context, Israel perceived the war as significant from the start because of its potential to link the Syrian and Israeli arenas in an effort to show that Hezbollah continues to defend Lebanon from Israel's subtle aggression.

Beyond direct confrontation, Israel and Hezbollah have been waging a psychological war for many years with various layers and characteristics. This war intensifies against the backdrop of the rapprochement between Israel and the Arab countries in recent years, which largely stems from the growing Iranian threat in the region resulting in increased legitimization of Israeli activity and presence in the region. Thus, the Lebanese Hezbollah is making a considerable attempt to tarnish Israel's image in the eyes of Arab public opinion and to portray it as the root of the violence in the region.

During the month of January, the Lebanese Hezbollah’s Al-Manar network broadcast a three-part "documentary" program, about two hours long, called "Syria - The Other Narrative."¹ Its creators accused Israel of promoting a plan to divide Syria even before the Arab Spring. In the campaign that preceded the broadcast, it promised to "expose" Israel’s involvement in the Syrian war, including an Israeli network of Mossad agents disguised as "social activists" working with American intelligence organizations to undermine Arab unity. It should be noted that this was not the first report on Israel's role in the Syrian campaign. Similar reports have appeared both in the media loyal to Hezbollah and on Syrian networks.²

¹ The program aired on Al-Manar on January 12, 19 and 26, 2019. For the second part, see: <https://www.facebook.com/baynaqawsain/videos/366491940804666>

The documentary was preceded by a social media campaign that began on January 11, 2019 under the hashtag, "Syria - The Other Narrative", [#سوريا_الرواية_الاخري](#)

² See, for example, the report here: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/my-friend-the-mossad-spy/>. Unfortunately, the original links to the Syrian websites are no longer active.



The logo of the program: “Syria – The Other Narrative”

The “Syrian Spring” – or an Intelligence Conspiracy?

Why did the Syrian war break out? In the Arab media, the widely accepted narrative holds that internal reasons led to the outbreak of the “Arab Spring” in Syria, such as the impact of the uprisings in neighboring countries, drought and unemployment, as well as a young generation that demanded a change in reality. However, as the editor of the film, Bashar al-Lakkis, explains, a more thorough examination based on the processing of over 5,000 documents reveals something different. The documents, most of which were leaked from WikiLeaks, and which originated from Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense and several Balkan countries that were involved in funding, training and arming opposition groups in Syria, as well as interviews conducted by the filmmakers with intelligence officials and diplomats in the West and in some Muslim countries, indicate that the riots in Syria broke out due to external involvement, with an emphasis on Israel. For example, the video includes an interview with former Turkish intelligence chief, İsmail Hakkı Pekin, who testified that the events in Syria were the result of joint efforts and coordination between Turkey and Israel. According to al-Lakkis, the purpose of the documentary, whose production lasted about two years, was to shed light on an unknown aspect of the war and to present a balanced picture that would impact the Arab narrative on the subject.³

The film reviews the nature of political-security relations between Israel and some of the armed groups in Syria through, among other things, interviews with decision-makers as well as senior military and intelligence officials in the US, Turkey, Israel and other countries. According to the filmmakers, Israel has invested considerable efforts over the years to the division of Syria, in cooperation with the US, by systematically infiltrating into Syria. It has done so not only by arming some of the rebel groups in Syria, but also by using NGO organizations that caused the emigration of religious minorities from Syria to Eastern Europe. According to the filmmakers, the Israeli

³ Firas Khalifa, "Bashar al-Lakkis wa-Hadi Ahmad: al-Riwaya al-Ukhra lil-Harb al-Suriyya", Al-Akhbar, January 11, 2019. https://www.al-akhbar.com/Media_Tv/264450/الرواية-الأخرى-للحرب-السوري

subversion was designed to break the Syria, Iran and Hezbollah resistance axis, to thwart Syrian aid to Palestinian factions opposed to Israel, and to prevent Syria from returning the Golan Heights to Syrian hands.

The first part of the film revealed documents allegedly written by the CIA, the American intelligence agency, detailing an Israeli-American plan to destabilize Syria. For example, one of the proposals dealt with how to inflame tensions between the Sunnis and the Alawites in order to lead the former to revolt against the current regime. It was also “revealed” that the head of the Israeli team responsible for destabilizing Syria was none other than Natan Sharansky, described as an Israeli statesman of Russian origin, who met with US President George W. Bush and reached a cooperation agreement with him on the subject. According to the filmmakers, Sharansky – who even won the American Medal of Freedom from US President George W. Bush – pointed out to President Bush that Islam presents an existential threat to the West, is violent and terrorist by nature, and that ways must be found to stop it from gaining strength. The Israeli team allegedly recruited other individuals, such as David Keyes⁴ and Nir Boms.⁵ With regard to the latter, one of the interviewees noted that Boms, one of the authors of this article and a researcher at Tel Aviv University, is not a proper academic and pointed to his former position at the Israeli Embassy in Washington as an Academic Affairs officer as evidence of this. He added that Boms exploited his experience and familiarity with the Syrian arena for operative organizational purposes intended to assist in the task of dividing Syria.

The second part of the film investigates Israel's infiltration of the Syrian arena and addresses the nature of its activity there. For example, the Israeli Mossad was accused of exploiting the Syrian civil war to assassinate a senior Syrian official in charge of developing the Syrian regime's missile system. Several Israeli figures were described as conspiring with leaders of rebel factions in Syria, meeting them secretly in various places, such as in Israel, Jordan, Turkey and more. For example, Druze MK Ayoob Kara was accused of conspiring with Abu Bilal, one of the commanders of the rebel factions in the Syrian Golan Heights, and Mendi Safadi, Kara's assistant, in a meeting with rebels and Turkish and Israeli intelligence officials in Turkey aimed at limiting Hezbollah's strengthening in Syria. According to various commentators interviewed for the film, Turkish and Israeli intelligence officials collaborated against Hezbollah in Syria despite the tension between Turkey and Israel. At the same time, Israel was presented as helping Al-Qaeda operatives in Syria, whether by providing medical

⁴ He worked in the past with Natan Sharansky, and served as the spokesman of the Israeli Prime Minister to foreign and international media. He was an activist for the release of political prisoners and promoted the rights of opponents to regimes throughout the Arab world and Iran.

⁵ An Israel academic who focuses on the study of Syria and a co-author of this article.

treatment or arms. Moreover, according to the filmmakers, Israel was also behind the arming of the Islamic State.

The third part of the film harshly criticizes the Syrian rebels who cooperate with Israel. For example, Dr. Kamal al-Labwani, a doctor and a key activist in the Syrian opposition in exile in Europe, who visited Israel and called for a more active Israeli role in the Syrian war, was described as a collaborator rather than a Syrian patriot who cares wholeheartedly for the future of his Syrian homeland. Al-Lubwani was described as exploiting the atmosphere in Syria for his personal pleasures, such as staying in luxury hotels in Israel, etc. In addition, the film points to the Israeli Mossad's attempt to recruit Syrian agents into its ranks through Israeli NGOs operating among the Syrian refugee population in Europe, such as in Greece.

This part of the film mentions three central teams that were in contact with Israeli intelligence agents, and were responsible for intelligence gathering and espionage activities for Israel. The Israeli team included Nir Boms, who ran an organization called ISAF.⁶ The American team included an American general named John Cappello, who was previously stationed at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, and Moti Kahana, an Israeli citizen and activist for Syrian refugees who was described as responsible for a spy network in Turkey, which received intelligence information from operatives throughout Syria and transferred it to Mendi Safadi. The Syrian team included Syrian opposition activists: Dr. Taysir (an educator and local leader from the Syrian Golan Heights), Abdallah Bashir al-Na'imi (an officer in the Free Syrian Army, originally from southern Syria), and Dr. Kamal al-Labwani.



A clip from the film that relates to the Israeli, American and Syrian teams (among the rebels) responsible for destabilizing the Syrian regime. In the photo: Dr. Taysir, Abdallah Bashir and Dr. Kamal al-Labwani; John Cappello from the US Embassy on the American side; and Nir Boms and Moti Kahana, an American Jewish activist, on the Israeli side.

⁶ Apparently, Israel Flying Aid, an airborne Israeli aid organization, which greatly helped Syrian refugees and displaced persons. The founder and CEO of Flying Aid is Gal Lusky.

In summary, the filmmakers cast direct responsibility for the civil war in Syria and its intensification on other countries in the region, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel. The film serves as an additional layer in the psychological war Hezbollah is waging against its critics by presenting it as a stabilizing force in the region that acts to eliminate dissident forces and terrorist elements in the Syrian region, and not as an agitator and instigator of war like Israel and Turkey. Hezbollah is also presented as a defensive force facing international conspiracies that could harm the entire Arab world - as well as the domestic arena in Lebanon - and therefore its involvement in the Syrian war is justified. At the same time, Syria is described as a central force in strengthening Arab solidarity and as a unifying element around Arab nationalism, partly because of its fighting in Israel and its support of the armed Palestinian factions.

As Hezbollah "exposes" the alleged involvement of the Israeli network in the Syrian war - including members of the opposition with ties to civilian elements in Israel - those willing to 'buy' this propaganda and treat all Israeli civil work as a governmental Zionist plot finds footing on another Middle Eastern plot about secret and sophisticated Mossad agents who were supposedly 'exposed' by the defenders of freedom in the Arab world. And if it is possible to regret something else in the wake of the unsuccessful "Israeli-American plan to divide Syria", it is the dismal end of this war for the nearly one million victims it claimed and the seven million refugees it created. In fact, it is in this area that Israel has gone above and beyond on the humanitarian level, an effort that is reflected in the significant saving of life in Syria. This is the story worthy of distinction.

ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy.

ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.

ABOUT THE JIHADI MONITORING GROUP

The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWMG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWMG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The

unique characteristic of JWMG publications is the team's integration of diverse materials from a wide variety of Arabic sources. JWMG connects each source to larger trends, providing a complete understanding of events on both a local and a global scale.