

Lebanon, Gaza, the Broader Syro-Iranian Offensive

Contributed by Administrator
 Thursday, 21 June 2007
 Last Updated Sunday, 24 June 2007

The latest dramatic military and terror events in Gaza and Lebanon can be viewed from a regional geopolitical perspective: A Syro-Iranian axis offensive on its (their) primarily western front stretching along the Mediterranean coast.

In previous analyses I have argued that the Tehran-Damascus axis is involved in a regional campaign to seize as much physical terrain and score as many victories across the Middle East in order to consolidate their strategic posture before 2008; the year they believe Americans will limit – perhaps diminish — their moves because of the U.S. presidential campaign season.

Iran's and Syria's offensives have been well-coordinated on battlefields across the Levant since last January, with a clear escalation since early spring.

Following are the main fronts:

Eastern Front: There have been multiple reports and much evidence of arming and supplying neo-Taliban and other Jihadi forces in Afghanistan in order that they may engage U.S.-led NATO forces and provoke chaos across the country.

Central Front: The axis has intensified its actions against U.S. and coalition forces, as wells as Iraqi civilians in an attempt to create more sectarian tension, with the greater objective of disrupting “surge” operations in particular, and generally eroding U.S. and allied efforts in Iraq.

Western Front: The axis has unleashed two blitzkrieg-like offensives — one on the upper western front (Lebanon). The other within the lower western front (Gaza).

1. In Lebanon, the Tehran-Damascus axis has had as its goals to crumble the Seniora Government, cripple the Lebanese Army, and crush the Cedars Revolution. To accomplish these, two approaches have been taken:

a) Terrorism: The assassination of MP Walid Eido in Beirut, other bombing attacks including car-bombs targeting and killing civilians.

b) Fatah al Islam attacks against the Lebanese Army in Nahr al bared and Tripoli in the north.

In Lebanon, the axis is expected to launch more terror attacks. We are looking at all Syro-Iranian assets in Lebanon, monitoring which ones will be deployed to battle next, and when.

2. The axis has also been involved in Gaza where they surprised observers with their decision to throw Hamas fully against Fatah and the PA in the enclave. The plan to seize control of Gaza was projected a long time ago. But the timing was at the discretion of the Syro-Iranian war room, which funds and strategically controls Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The heavy fighting in Gaza represents an important decision made by the regional masters: The acceleration of the axis offensive so that by the end of summer, four battlefields will be fully ignited against the U.S., its allies and regional democracies: Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza (Palestinian territories). But just as important is the fact that an entire Taliban-like zone has been established on the eastern Mediterranean under Hamas control and with Syro-Iranian backing. Our expectations are that, short of a large-scale counter-operation aimed at dislodging the "coup" in the enclave, the area will become a massive terror base of operations.

In the final analysis, the axis' offensive on their western front is peaking. The immediate goal of the axis is to protect the Syrian regime’s western (Lebanon) flank and southern (Israel) flank.

Thrusting in Lebanon and spreading chaos, also would potentially shield Bashar al Assad from the upcoming UN investigation into the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (and others).

Seizing Gaza would, in their estimation, curtail U.S. efforts in Iraq, and pressure Israel away from Syria and Hezbollah. The Jihadi strategic mind is in its full offensive mode in the region.

Dr Walid Phares is the Director of the Future Terrorism Project at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and

the author of The War of Ideas