

The shrinking of Iran's expansionist project

Khairallah Khairallah
is a Lebanese journalist
based in London.



“The militias created by Iran in the region are clones of IRGC.”

Contrary to what some people might believe, Iran didn't come out victorious in Syria. The reality tells a different story: Iran has contributed to the destruction of Syria rather than bringing it back to life. Iran is an accomplice in the project aiming at ripping Syria apart and nothing more.

The reality shows that Iran's crisis is not limited to Syria but includes the slow death of Iran's expansionist project. This is why Iran is trying to take advantage of the referendum in Kurdistan to breathe life into its project. Iran wants to turn the Kurdish referendum into an excuse to tighten its grip on Iraq through its sectarian militias within the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF).

These militias are tools by which Iran wants to control the future of the region. Iran's game plan is no longer a secret despite having the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and the Iraqi parliament use the war on the Islamic State (ISIS) as an excuse to confer legitimacy on the PMF.

ISIS was simply one of the weapons of the Iranian and Syrian secret services. There were two objectives behind its creation: Allowing the Syrian regime to look like it was fighting terrorism and finding a use for the PMF as a replacement for the legitimate Iraqi Army. This is how we can explain why the government of former Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, which was totally subservient to Iran,

handed on a silver platter the city of Mosul to ISIS in June 2014.

Iran has no alternative model to offer to countries it wishes to enlist except that of its own Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The religious oligarchy in Iran has not trusted the regular Iranian Army since the fall of the shah in 1979. So the IRGC took over the army's role.

In 1980, when Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein engaged in all-out war with Iran, little did he know that he had given the Khomeini regime the perfect excuse to keep the army out of Iranian cities and on the front. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini feared the army and did everything to replace it with the IRGC.

The militias created by Iran in the region are clones of IRGC. Iran's expansionist plans are contingent on replicating the IRGC everywhere. The best example is Hezbollah in Leba-

non. This party has subjugated most of the Shia population in Lebanon and is constantly trying to dictate its will, and that of Iran of course, on the Lebanese government. Lebanon continues to resist the culture of death brought in by Hezbollah and life always triumphs in Lebanon.

In Syria, Iran did its best to plant its sectarian militias everywhere. It was an accomplice to the Syrian regime in its campaigns against the major Syrian cities. The cities were targeted because they were, first and foremost, Sunni cities. Iran contributed to the regime's actions to fundamentally change the nature of Damascus. These were actions against life itself in an open-ended war.

In Iraq, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and two Shia personalities, Muqtada al-Sadr and Ammar al-Hakim, openly expressed annoyance with Iran. Baghdad decided to get close to the Arab countries and Saudi Arabia in particular.

Iran is taking advantage of the general outcry against the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan to try to recapture the initiative in Iraq. The truth is that Iran will not be able to triumph over the Kurds, not even the Kurds of Iran. The latter openly celebrated along with their Iraqi cousins the referendum result. It was proof that the regime of the Islamic Republic is far from working for the well-being of all Iranians. It's a dictatorship with no future. Who can guarantee that there is a new supreme leader for Iran once Ali Khomeini is gone?

Iran is doomed to fail in Syria and in Yemen as well. Its proxies in Yemen, the Houthis, are finding nothing better to do than to bug their ally, former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

For its expansionist project to work, Iran will need more than its death-obsessed sectarian militias, more than American complicity and definitely more than its alliance with Russia for Syrian President Bashar Assad's sake.

No matter how wily Iranian leaders are and no matter how much they hate the Arabs, they can never win hearts with what they are offering. Iran is good at destroying but has nothing to offer instead. It is only natural that its expansionist plan is shrinking.

A country in which half of the population lives under the poverty line can only offer death, hollow slogans and controversy. Consider Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's latest speech in which he called upon Jews "to leave occupied Palestine and return to their countries of origin to avoid becoming fodder for the upcoming war. They might not have enough time to leave."

Is this really the time for this kind of discourse, which harks back to pre-1967? Can these sectarian militias still claim victory for Iran?

Iran's expansionist project is dead and Lebanon is the only country left where Iran can flex its muscles. Nasrallah might be able to turn it into an Iranian colony after all.

“Iran's expansionist project is dead and Lebanon is the only country left where Iran can flex its muscles.”

Las Vegas shooting was terrifying but not terrorism

Rashmee Roshan Lall

is a columnist for The Arab Weekly. Her blog can be found at www.rashmee.com and she is on Twitter: @rashmeerl.



“The real issue is America's epidemic of gun violence, a firearm homicide rate 16 times that of Germany and six times that of Canada.”

Should the Las Vegas shooting, the worst act of mass murder in recent American history, be described as "terrorism"? Was the killer, a white American man, a "terrorist"?

Was he just the same as Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people in a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in June 2016? Should he be categorised in the way of Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, the married couple who shot 14 people in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015?

This is an uneasy line of questioning. The Vegas shooter, Stephen Paddock, did undoubtedly strike terror in the hearts of the thousands of concert-goers he targeted on October 1. He committed an act of terrifying violence. He was a despicable criminal but not, so far as one can discern in the immediate aftermath of the Vegas atrocity, a terrorist.

This has nothing to do with Paddock's religion or apparent

lack of it. It is to do with the proper meaning of words. Terrorism has a very specific meaning. English dictionaries describe terror as a very specific thing, particularly from the late 18th century. The Oxford English Dictionary refers to the rule of the Jacobin faction during the period of the French Revolution known as the Terror. Terrorism then is regarded as "the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims."

Political science scholars generally agree on the broad criteria of a terrorist act, of which political inspiration must be key.

So far as is known, Paddock was not pursuing political aims in mystifyingly stockpiling weapons and ammunition in his Vegas hotel room and mowing down 59 of his fellow Americans. He terrorised the crowd but he was not a terrorist.

The problem is the clamour for Paddock to be described as a terrorist and the fact that many well-meaning people see the

American authorities' refusal to do so as an example of unfairness to Muslims.

The American singer Ariana Grande, whose Manchester concert was targeted by a terrorist in May, has demanded that US President Donald Trump call the Vegas shooting "what it is." Trump subsequently declined to say the incident was an act of domestic terrorism and called the killer "sick and demented."

This was taken as proof that non-Muslim murderers get a straight pass. The argument goes that such linguistic restraint would not have been employed had Paddock been Muslim. The attack would have been described as a terrorist strike straight off and the entire Muslim community would've been under the spotlight.

Are we at risk of losing sight of the real issues at stake in our turning world by marinating ourselves in bitterness about western Islamophobia? This is not to discount its existence – Islamophobia is very real – and

this is not to say it doesn't manifest itself in various ways but the charged debate over the Vegas incident's nomenclature is enervating and useless.

The real issue is America's epidemic of gun violence, a firearm homicide rate 16 times that of Germany and six times that of Canada. America has almost as many privately owned firearms as American citizens and residents. Americans with guns are statistically said to pose a greater threat to their fellow citizens than are Muslims, immigrants or jihadi terrorists. A recent estimate stated there were 1,516 mass shootings in the United States over 1,735 days.

Thomas Friedman, one of liberal America's favourite newspaper columnists, wrote after the Vegas massacre that all would have been clear to Americans had Paddock only been Muslim. He meant the irony of being able to recognise the threat posed by Islamist terrorism but not by an America awash in guns.

The Arab Weekly

Published by Al Arab Publishing House

Publisher and Group Executive Editor
Haitham El-Zobaidi, PhD

Editor-in-Chief
Oussama Romdhani

Managing Editor
Iman Zayat

Deputy Managing Editor and Online Editor
Mamoon Alabbasi

Senior Editor
John Hendel

Chief Copy Editor
Richard Pretorius

Copy Editor
Stephen Quillen

Analysis Section Editor
Ed Blanche

East/West Section Editor
Mark Habeeb

Gulf Section Editor
Mohammed Alkhereiji

Society and Travel Sections Editor
Samar Kadi

Syria and Lebanon Section Editor
Simon Speakman Cordall

Contributing Editor
Rashmee Roshan Lall

Senior Correspondents
Mahmud el-Shafey (London)
Lamine Ghanmi (Tunis)

Regular Columnists
Claude Salhani
Yavuz Baydar

Correspondents
Saad Guerraoui (Casablanca)
Dunia El-Zobaidi (London)
Roua Khlifi (Tunis)
Thomas Seibert (Washington)

Chief Designer
Marwen el-Hmedi

Designers
Ibrahim Ben Bechir
Hanan Jebali

Subscription & Advertising:
Ads@alarab.co.uk
Tel 020 3667 7249

Mohamed Al Mufti
Marketing & Advertising
Manager

Tel (Main) +44 20 7602 3999
Direct: +44 20 8742 9262
www.alarab.co.uk

US Publisher:
Ibrahim Zobeidi
(248) 803 1946

Al Arab Publishing House
Quadrant Building
177-179 Hammersmith Road
London W6 8BS

Tel: (+44) 20 7602 3999
Fax: (+44) 20 7602 8778