

Who was behind the attack on the US embassy in Syria?

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On Tuesday, Syrian officials foiled an attack on the American embassy in Damascus. Three of the attackers were shot and killed, while another was captured by Syria. Three Syrian security agents were wounded, along with ten civilians and a Chinese diplomat.

Syria has initially fingered a little-known group called Jund al-Sham, an organization that reportedly has ties to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.

In evaluating an event such as the failed attack on the US embassy in Damascus, it is necessary first of all to ask the question, “Who benefits?”—or, in this case, “Who would have benefited?”

Who could possibly have an interest in attacking the American embassy? The attack failed because of the intervention of the Syrian forces, combined with the apparently primitive character of the explosives used by the attackers. If it had succeeded, however, the most likely consequence would have been a sharp increase in pressure directed against Syria by the United States government. This would have played into the hands of sections of the American establishment who have been pushing for military actions against Syria and/or Iran.

In an article in *Time* magazine posted yesterday, Scott Macleod noted that, while the Syrian regime has come into conflict with the US, it would have no interest in seeing the attack carried through. “Assad’s regime knows that could be a *casus belli* for a US military strike on Syria,” he wrote. “Relations have been tense for years. The US recalled its ambassador in Damascus after Syria, despite its denials, was implicated in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005.” The assassination of Hariri itself is highly suspicious, and it is not possible to rule out Israeli or US involvement in that incident as well.

What seems least likely is that the attack on the American embassy was simply the product of a few

individuals, motivated purely by hatred of the United States and American policy. Of course this cannot be entirely eliminated as a possibility, but it is in the nature of such organizations as Jund al-Sham that they are heavily infiltrated and are extremely susceptible to the manipulations of this or that outside power.

Both American and Israeli intelligence agencies have a long history of manipulating these groups. Jund al-Sham was reportedly established in alliance with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi with funds provided by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1999. At the time, the US was still doing deals with the Taliban and the Islamic fundamentalists of Afghanistan as part of its efforts to secure a gas pipeline through the country.

Since its founding, Jund al-Sham has shown little interest in the United States, directing its attacks mainly against the Syrian government because of the latter’s secular orientation. It has also targeted Syria’s ally, Hezbollah.

In considering the events of September 12, 2006, it should be recalled that the attacks five years ago were carried out by individuals, known by American intelligence agencies to be members of Al Qaeda, who were allowed to freely enter and exit the United States, take flight training classes and purchase one-way, first class tickets on major airlines—all in the face of mounting intelligence indicating that Al Qaeda was planning to hijack airplanes and attack the United States. It is almost certain that sections of the American intelligence and political apparatus were aware of an impending attack but decided to let it take place—in order to establish a pretext for carrying out important US policy goals.

During the past several weeks, there have been several events to remind us of the extremely useful role that Al Qaeda plays in furthering the interests of

American imperialism. In a number of his speeches leading up to the September 11 anniversary, Bush reproduced statements, supposedly from Osama bin Laden, declaring Iraq—conveniently enough—to be the centerpiece in the struggle for the “Islamic caliphate.” This of course is quite useful for the US government, which would like to continue to portray the brutal occupation of Iraq as part of the “war on terror,” and would like to continue to link this occupation, in spite of all contrary evidence, to the attacks of September 11.

Then, shortly before the anniversary, a new tape emerges depicting Osama bin Laden greeting some of the September 11 hijackers prior to the attacks: Another convenient reminder that the “war on terror” continues.

The Democrats occasionally denounce the Bush administration for failing to capture or kill bin Laden. They do this in order to present themselves as the more consistent advocates of the “war on terror.” No one bothers to suggest that perhaps the main reason he has not been captured or killed is that he continues to be a very useful asset of the Central Intelligence Agency. It was the CIA, after all, that fostered him in the 1980s as part of the proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

Now there is an attack on Syria, apparently organized by a similarly shady and amorphous outfit with ties to bin Laden. It comes at a time of increasing crisis within the American political establishment. The occupation of Iraq is in deep crisis. Democratic and Republican commentators alike are calling for more American troops to deal with the Shia militias in the south and the Sunni organizations in the west. Israel’s invasion of Lebanon has been a debacle, and only served to increase the prestige of Hezbollah and strengthen the hand of Iran in the region.

Major divisions are beginning to emerge between Europe and the US over Iranian policy, with the EU—bolstered by the US-Israeli disaster in Lebanon—seeking to make its own accommodation with the regime in Tehran. At the same time, there is growing opposition and skepticism within the United States, as broad sections of the population are beginning to reject the whole fraud of the “war on terror,” and the President’s speech on the fifth anniversary is striking largely in its completely unreal and unbelievable rhetoric.

There is a significant section of the US ruling elite

that considers the only “solution” to these problems to be a massive escalation of US aggression—including attacks on Iran and Syria and the complete militarization of American society. In the furtherance of these aims, an attack on an American embassy in Syria would be quite convenient indeed.

This is not to suggest that the attackers on Tuesday were themselves working for sections of US intelligence. Individually, they were likely motivated by a combination of anger over American intervention in the Middle East, combined with the reactionary ideology of Islamic fundamentalism. Such actions are organized more tangentially, and the individuals who are directly involved have no idea who is manipulating them. The extremely bungled character of the operation—which failed to even penetrate the embassy walls—suggests that those involved in the direct planning were highly inexperienced.

Whether or not it could serve as a *casus belli* for attacking Syria, the attack would—and even if its failure still does—allow the administration to argue that the war on terror is not over, thereby justifying the administration’s policy and Bush’s speech on Monday. It also allows them to step up pressure on Syria.

Indeed, aside from the obligatory remarks of appreciation for Syria’s actions in foiling the attack, this was the main tenor of administration comments on Tuesday. “Stop harboring terrorist groups, stop being an agent in fomenting terror,” White House spokesman Tony Snow declared. “Work with us to fight against terror, as Libya has done—that’s the next step for Syria.” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the attacks demonstrated that terrorists can still attack diplomatic facilities anywhere, in spite of “an extraordinary effort” to prevent them.

Of course one cannot rule out other possibilities to US involvement, and there are many possibilities. However, in such cases one is entitled to speculate.



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