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Subject: Assad, terrorism, Trump's ceasefire

Throughout World War I and II, the Soviets were keenly aware that propaganda and narrative are just as important as guns and manpower in winning conflicts. They understood that discrediting the opposition and having a "perfect enemy" is effective for winning support for their own cause, and toward that end they put a lot of effort into spreading propaganda among their adversaries:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/okhrana-the-paris-operations-of-the-russian-imperial-police/5474-1.html>

...Pyotr Rachkovsky, probably the ablest head of the Okhrana's Foreign Bureau. Rachkovsky was a pioneer. He refined the art of what we today call active measures or perceptions management techniques.

...According to one authority, Rachkovsky was a "born intriguer" who "delighted" in forging documents. He allegedly was among those responsible for the anti-Semitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion, perhaps the most infamous political forgery of the 20th century. Rachkovsky's tactic of exploiting anti-Semitism for political purposes was used repeatedly during the Soviet era

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/groups/scr/kellogg.pdf>

The greatest piece of "evidence" that right-wing Russian elements used to support their assertions of a Jewish world-conspiracy came in the form of a vitriolic tract best known as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. ...The Protocols were most likely fabricated in 1897 or 1898 in Paris. The Protocols critique liberalism, claiming that it is a tool for the Jews to gain world-domination by fomenting discontent and revolt so that they can use the ensuing chaos to establish a Jewish despot to rule over the world.

...It is important to note that the Protocols were not widely distributed in pre-Revolutionary Russian society, even in reactionary circles. They were not "discovered" until after the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution, after which they were widely distributed among the "White" forces during the Russian Civil War.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norihiro_Yasue

At the age of 33, Captain Yasue was assigned as part of the Japanese intervention in Siberia, to aid the Russian White Army in their struggle against the Bolshevik Red Army. A Russian-language specialist, he was assigned to the staff of General Gregorii Semenov, a vehement anti-Semite who distributed copies of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to all of his troops, along with weapons and rations. Along with a few dozen other Japanese soldiers, Yasue read and accepted the premises of the Protocols, and would allow this to guide much of his actions and views into the time of the beginning of World War II.

After his return to Japan in 1922, Yasue worked in the Army Intelligence Bureau, translating the Protocols of the Elders of Zion into Japanese, while continuing to speak with Inuzuka and a handful of others about the Jewish problem in Russia. Their group grew quickly, publishing articles in internal army journals, and holding informal lectures and discussion groups.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koreshige_Inuzuka

After the war, he was stationed off the coast of Vladivostok during the Siberian Intervention to aid the White Russians against the Bolshevik Red Army. It was there that he first heard of and read the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a powerful anti-Semitic document detailing a Jewish worldwide conspiracy. The document was forged and distributed by Russian General Gregorii Semenov, a leader of the White forces.

In 1922, after returning to Japan, Inuzuka began to gather a coterie of sympathetic officers who believed in the Protocols. This group of so-called 'Jewish-experts' slowly became larger and more outspoken over the next several years. The group published many documents detailing their thoughts on the Jewish conspiracy, including lists of known Jews, and a Japanese translation of the Protocols

...As war with China approached in the 1930s, Inuzuka came to support the 'Manchurian faction,' a number of military men who believed that control of Manchuria was crucial to Japan's survival.

<http://bookfi.net/dl/548070/5d8658>

Hausen is best known not for publicizing the Zunder Document, but for publishing The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. He printed the Protocols for the first time in German in 1919.

...Hausen received information on Nilus' personality and on the provenance of the Protocols from an intelligence agency in Berlin under General Kurlov, who had earlier served as the head of the Imperial Russian Okhrana.

...Kommissarov, a prominent member of the Saint Petersburg Okhrana, provided the Union with additional support. ...After the outbreak of socialist revolution in the Russian Empire in 1905, he established a clandestine printing press in the basement of Okhrana headquarters. He used this press to print anti-Semitic leaflets calling for pogroms.

...Kommissarov proved a most colorful adventurer who underwent many permutations in his career of intrigue and deceit. He ultimately helped to establish Aufbau, the Munich-based völkisch German/White émigré organization that greatly influenced the National Socialist movement, in 1920 as a double agent before he openly joined the Soviet cause.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aufbau_Vereinigung

The long-term influence of Aufbau has been traced in the implementation of the final solution and in Hitler's disastrous decision to divert troops away from Moscow towards the Ukraine in 1941.

Prominent members of Aufbau included:

- Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter (a Baltic German from the Russian Empire)
- Alfred Rosenberg (a Baltic German from the Russian Empire)

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007058>

Nazi party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg introduced Hitler to the Protocols during the early 1920s, as Hitler was developing his worldview. Hitler referred to the Protocols in some of his early political speeches, and, throughout his career, he exploited the myth that "Jewish-Bolshevists" were conspiring to control the world.

During the 1920s and 1930s, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion played an important part in the Nazis' propaganda arsenal. The Nazi party published at least 23 editions of the Protocols between 1919 and 1939. Following the Nazis' seizure of power in 1933, some schools used the Protocols to indoctrinate students.

...The importance of the events in the occupied Soviet Union for the history of the Holocaust can hardly be overestimated. Despite its constant power struggles with the SS and other German agencies, Rosenberg's ministry played a key role in the evolution of the "Final Solution."

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/07/09/ex-soviet-bloc-spy-chief-explains-hidden-origin-todays-jihad.html>

Thus, the Romanian DIE (counterpart of KGB foreign intelligence), which I headed, in 1972 received from the KGB an Arabic translation of the old Russian forgery, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." We also received "documentary" material in Arabic produced by the Soviet disinformation "proving" America was a Zionist country whose aim was to transform the Islamic world into a Jewish fief.

My DIE was ordered to disseminate these documents within its targeted Islamic countries. During my later years in Romania, the DIE disseminated thousands of copies of "The Protocols" and similar "documents" each month.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-russia-assad-soviet-defeat-nazis-anniversary-putin-relations-a7724641.html>

"For Russia, Islamic terrorism is yesterday's fascism and Moscow's support for Syrian President Assad is seen as necessary through Kremlin lenses." By promoting Victory Day in Syria, says Karasik, "Russia is also showing its prowess in today's Middle East."

Syrian intelligence might have picked up on this idea. Historically, Syrian intelligence has been a powerful political force in Syria, both effective and brutal:

<https://www.channel4.com/news/is-assad-isis-rebel-forces-iraq-syria>

David Butter, a leading expert on Syria and an associate fellow at think-tank Chatham House, told Channel 4 News that the links between Isis and Syrian intelligence date back to the aftermath of the Iraq war of 2003.

"The leaders Isis have already worked hand in glove with Syrian intelligence, whether supplying them with

weapons or supplying money flowing from their racketeering activities around Mosul.”

He added: “Intelligence officers will have almost certainly forged links during that time and there has almost certainly been some degree of regime manipulation. To what extent one is actually controlling the other is more difficult.”

In particular, Syrian intelligence is known to use "plausibly deniable" terrorist activities to achieve its ends:

<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/download/11815/12637>

In November 1970, Hafiz al-Asad ousted Jadid in what he labelled a 'Corrective Coup.' The Asad regime has proved to be Syria's most stable and durable since independence and has toned down the previous radicalism. Under Asad there has been a remarkable continuity among the senior personnel in the intelligence community. 41 This contrasts with the turbulence of the two preceding decades reflects both the stability of his regime and the extent to which the commanders of the main intelligence organs are linked to Asad by personal and family ties. Asad's regime is very much a minority clique. The top leadership are drawn largely from Asad's extended family and the Alawite community. Its main props have been the intelligence agencies, paramilitary units and certain military commands. 42

In the 1970s, the intelligence agencies were very active abroad and were heavily involved in guerrilla and terrorist operations, especially those carried out by proxy groups. 43 The foci of this activity were fedayeen operations in the Golan and northern Israel. Additionally, sabotage, assassination and terrorist operations were carried out in Europe and in the Arab world.

...These institutions have increasingly turned their attention to foreign policy. In Lebanon, Military Intelligence (MI) has emerged as the dominant institution. The use of terrorism, especially by MI and Air Force Intelligence, is well documented. 48 To take a few incidents from just one year, in 1983 Jordanian embassy officials were attacked in Spain, Greece, Italy and India. Two were killed and five wounded. Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) officials were attacked in Greece and Portugal, resulting in two dead and three wounded. Other bomb attacks in Israel, Turkey and Jordan injured twelve people. Such methods became the primary ones of Syrian foreign policy in this period. The regime was encouraged to use them by their evident success. Through the use of terrorism Asad was able to rid himself of political opponents, drive Israel and the US out of Lebanon, and bring both Jordan's King Hussein and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat into line on a number of crucial occasions.

...This was not, of course, the end of the secret war between the Jordanian and Syrian intelligence services. Violence was to re-erupt often in the following decades, especially after 1970, when Asad sought to keep Jordan in the anti-Israeli camp. 87 Nonetheless, this brief account of an especially bitter episode in the struggle brings out a number of characteristics of Syrian covert operations. First, it highlights the use of terrorism as part of a coordinated political warfare strategy that sought to make it appear as if the violence was home-grown and that King Hussein faced widespread domestic discontent. Second, when this strategy lost credibility, Syria continued to employ indigenous proxies, such as Rimawi and Mutalq. This approach presaged the use of deniable Palestinian proxies from the late-1960s on.

https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0304_s2.htm

Syria's Proxy Forces in Iraq

April 2003

Although the rapid demise of Saddam Hussein's regime and the deployment of American forces along the

Syria-Iraq border may have led to a suspension of Syrian assistance to the Iraqi war effort, the effects of Syria's most decisive contribution to the Iraqi war effort will likely be felt for months to come. Efforts by Syrian President Bashar Assad to mobilize thousands of non-Iraqi "volunteers" to fight the United States and facilitate their entry into the Iraqi theater through Syrian territory have a striking historical precedent - his father's successful war by proxy against US and European peacekeepers in Lebanon during the early 1980s. The goal of that campaign - to prevent the restoration of Lebanese democracy - bears an eerie resemblance to Syria's objective today.

In early March, Iraqi intelligence opened a training camp for Arab "martyrs" near the town of al-Khalis, 40 miles north of Baghdad. Over the next few weeks, Syrian-backed political and terrorist organizations undertook a massive mobilization campaign in Syria and Syrian-occupied Lebanon.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/world/middleeast/07syria.html>

Syria Is Said to Be Strengthening Ties to Opponents of Iraq's Government

OCT. 7, 2007

DAMASCUS, Syria, Oct. 6 — Syria is encouraging Sunni Arab insurgent groups and former Iraqi Baathists with ties to the leaders of Saddam Hussein's government to organize here, diplomats and Syrian political analysts say. By building strong ties to those groups, they say, Syria hopes to gain influence in Iraq before what it sees as the inevitable waning of the American presence there.

"The Syrians feel American power is much weaker in Iraq than in the past," said Ibrahim Hamidi, the Damascus bureau chief of the pan-Arab daily newspaper Al Hayat. "Now they can take a bold public initiative like helping Iraq's opposition organize without much fear, especially since President Bush has become a lame duck."

...Syria, which the United States accuses of channeling Islamic militants into Iraq, denies any role in organizing groups opposed to the Iraqi government. Analysts and diplomats, however, said they strongly doubted that the groups could operate in Syria, a police state, without the approval of the government.

It looks like this tactic hasn't changed that much in the current Syrian conflict. The difference is that the regime's enemies are now operating on Syria's own soil, and the terrorist organizations serve a more crucial role than to just attack the rebels with plausible deniability. Assad for the most part has not been shy about having the brutality used against the rebels tied to his name (although he did try to blame the recent chemical attack on "terrorists" working with the U.S. <http://nypost.com/2017/04/13/assad-completely-denies-any-involvement-in-syrian-gas-attack/>). Instead, the very existence of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS have been a propaganda win for Assad, who has used them to paint the entire opposition as terrorists:

<http://www.newsweek.com/syria-propaganda-aleppo-assad-536003>

Wartime propaganda has a long history. The earliest records go back to the rise of the Persian king Darius. In the modern era, some of the most effective propaganda occurred during World War I, with reports of German soldiers bludgeoning babies during the "Rape of Belgium."

The conflict in Syria has produced plenty of propaganda, as well. Only now the info war is playing out on Facebook and Twitter with a ferocity I've never seen. Both sides—Bashar al-Assad's government forces aided by their Russian and Iranian allies—and the opposition, are involved. The regime has tried to depict the rebels, monolithically, as supporters of the Islamic State militant group (ISIS). The government's propaganda refers to the opposition as "head choppers" due to ISIS's preferred method of execution.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/syria-isis-have-been-ignoring-each-other-battlefield-data-suggests-n264551>

Syrian President Bashar Assad has been accused of encouraging the rise of Islamist extremist groups, like ISIS, in order to discredit opposition to his rule. He lashed out at the suggestion in a recent interview with Paris Match, describing ISIS as an enemy and saying that the "army is winning" its fight against terrorists.

<http://time.com/3719129/assad-isis-asset/>

Assad does not see ISIS as his primary problem, the businessman says. "The regime fears the Free Syrian Army and the Nusra Front, not ISIS. They [the FSA and Nusra] state their goal is to remove the President. But ISIS doesn't say that. They have never directly threatened Damascus." As the businessman notes, the strikes on ISIS targets are minimal. "If the regime were serious about getting rid of ISIS, they would have bombed Raqqa by now. Instead they bomb other cities, where the FSA is strong." That said, the businessman does not believe that the regime has a formal relationship with ISIS, just a pragmatic one. "The more powerful ISIS grows, the more they are useful for the regime. They make America nervous, and the Americans in turn see the regime as a kind of bulwark against ISIS."

A senior Western diplomat who specializes in the Syrian civil war agrees that ISIS is seen as an asset by Assad. "They will do whatever it takes to devalue the opposition, even if it means strengthening ISIS. They know that if it comes to choosing between the black flag [of ISIS] and Damascus, the international community will choose Damascus." And the strategy has worked extremely well. "The way it's going now, it's a matter of months, not even a year, that the moderate opposition is so weakened that it won't be a factor anymore. So in just a few months from now the regime will be able to achieve its strategic goal of forcing the world to choose between Damascus and the black flags."

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/assad-henchman-heres-how-we-built-isis>

Sednaya was not a site for correction and rehabilitation but functioned as an incubator for jihadism, according to former prisoners and intelligence defectors. Some former detainees called it a "five star" prison.

...When the Syrian uprising began in mid-March 2011, Assad began releasing religious extremists from Sednaya.

The regime said it was a response to activists' demands to free political prisoners. U.S. intelligence officials, who spoke on background, offer a similar explanation. But sending known al Qaeda extremists into a country seething with unrest was also a cynical ploy to use extremists to further his political ends, according to Naser.

"The reason the regime released them at the beginning of the Syrian revolution was to complete the militarization of the uprising," said Naser, who defected in late 2012, "and to spur criminal acts so that revolution would become a criminal case and give the impression that the regime is fighting terrorists."

...They rose rapidly to leadership positions, said al-Ali. Having spent time at Sednaya was the equivalent of a graduate degree with honors. "If someone is a 'graduate' of Sednaya, he is indisputably a 'Sheikh,'" he said. "People will say 'he paid a high price' serving in Sednaya."

Syria's intelligence apparatus was the big winner. With intimate knowledge of all the ex-detainees, it had a file on every one of them and was positioned to maintain its contacts with them.

Civil activists see those releases as part of Assad's plan to ruin the revolution.

And it worked, activist Diab Serriya said. "The regime was very successful in distorting the image of the revolution," said Serriya. "Now the battle is portrayed as being between the secular regime and extremist Islamic groups."

This might strike the reader as a similar idea to Soviet's spreading of fascist propaganda like "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" to discredit their adversaries during the Russian civil war and World War II (the Soviets also used "anti-fascism" as a rallying cry for their own troops and Communists around the world). The similarity in their methods might not be coincidental--Russian intelligence is said to be intimately involved with Syrian intelligence:

https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000272980.pdf

Soviet Support for International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence

27 May 1981

...The Soviets are deeply engaged in support of revolutionary violence worldwide. Such involvement is a basic tenet of Soviet policy, pursued in the interests of weakening unfriendly societies, destabilizing hostile regimes, and advancing Soviet interests.

...There is conclusive evidence that the USSR directly or indirectly supports a large number of national insurgencies and some separatist-irredentist groups. Many of these entities, of both types, carry out terrorist activities as part of their larger programs of revolutionary violence.

<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/download/11815/12637>

...the former Soviet Union, along with the East Bloc satellite states, had at times intimate ties with the Syrian intelligence apparatus

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_S

Center S (Центр С in Cyrillic script) was a secret, joint, Russian–Syrian signals intelligence 'spy' post near Al-Harra in southwestern Syria close to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.[1]

Presumably existing since before 2006, it was run over by Free Syrian Army rebels on 5 October 2014 during the Daraa offensive (October 2014).

...The Center was operated on a joint Russian-Syrian basis, with Syrian Intelligence and the OSNAZ unit of the Russian GRU monitoring signals intelligence from Syrian rebels, as well as the Israel Defense Forces.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20161230024006/http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11148857/Russian-spy-base-in-Syria-used-to-monitor-rebels-and-Israel-seized.html>

The extent of Russian-Syrian intelligence and military cooperation is vast and has been established for many decades.

In 2006, Jane's defence journal reported that Hezbollah was receiving intelligence from two Russian-Syrian intelligence posts during its war with Israel, one of which was identified as being located on the Golan Heights.

The discovery of Centre C is "definitely not surprising", security analyst Daniel Nisman, head of the geopolitical risk consultancy 'Levantine Group' in Tel Aviv, told the Telegraph.

"The Russians have had varying levels of activity and personnel in Syria since the Cold War", said Mr Nisman. "There are [also] all sorts of different Russian personnel embedded with different Syrian units.

Both Russian and Syrian intelligence share a habit of supporting terrorist activity around the world. This is a serious problem, as Syrian intelligence is said to have heavily infiltrated terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/assad-henchman-heres-how-we-built-isis>

Nabeel Dendal, former director of political intelligence in Latakia, the Assad family's ancestral home, said he twice led security forces in raids on al Qaeda cells, only to learn that the cell leader he was working for was supported by the Syrian intelligence.

"They were preparing them to be leaders," the defected colonel said, referring to the Assad regime. An example is Nadim Baloush, an al Qaeda cell leader he arrested in Latakia in 2006, and told him "don't do anything. I am working for Assef Shawkat," Assad's brother-in-law who served as the deputy defense minister. Baloush was arrested after he traveled to Turkey about a year ago and is reported to have committed suicide in prison.

Dendal was introduced to this reporter by a former regime judge from Aleppo who deserted to the opposition. Interviewed in a café in Istanbul's popular Fatih district, which is now packed with Syrian refugees, he estimated that half the commanders in ISIS are working with the regime today; other defectors from the security sector say it's about one third. According to Naser, most of the top commanders of Daesh in Raqqa are linked with Syrian intelligence.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/01/21/Al-Qaeda-detainees-reveal-ties-with-Assad.html>

Al-Qaeda detainees reveal ties with Assad

The FSA, joined with other moderate rebel groups, declared a war on ISIS, accusing it of cooperating with the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and of seeking to divide rebels.

Ever since the fighting broke out many in both sides were killed or detained. Some of those al-Qaeda members who fell to rebels' hands said ISIS had ties with the Syrian regime.

"It happened once that a Syrian regime officer and 11 others defected and drove their vehicle through Masila [north of Raqqa]. We received ordered to arrest them and hand them over back to the regime," a detained al-Qaeda member said.

He said ISIS was behind a bombing that destroyed Raqqa's train station last year. "We received orders from Commander Abu Anas al-Iraqi to bomb the train station. We were also ordered to fire on ambulances and civilians trying to reach the victims," he said.

Abu Anas al-Iraqi leads an al-Qaeda brigade in the province of Raqqa. He is nicknamed al-Iraqi after his country Iraq, where he used to work as an intelligence officer, according to another detainee.

"Abu Anas is financed directly by the regime, through Iran and Iraq. His brigade is specialized in kidnappings, car bombs and targeted assassinations of FSA members," the detainee said.

While several ISIS members shown on the video were reportedly captured during fighting, many said they defected after realizing the brutality and the agenda of the al-Qaeda affiliate.

<https://www.channel4.com/news/is-assad-isis-rebel-forces-iraq-syria>

David Butter, a leading expert on Syria and an associate fellow at think-tank Chatham House, told Channel 4 News that the links between Isis and Syrian intelligence date back to the aftermath of the Iraq war of 2003.

“The leaders Isis have already worked hand in glove with Syrian intelligence, whether supplying them with weapons or supplying money flowing from their racketeering activities around Mosul.”

He added: “Intelligence officers will have almost certainly forged links during that time and there has almost certainly been some degree of regime manipulation. To what extent one is actually controlling the other is more difficult.”

And the Assad regime is said to have helped fund terrorists organizations like ISIS, help them grow in various ways, and at times collaborated with them in direct and indirect ways:

<http://time.com/3719129/assad-isis-asset/>

The regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad has long had a pragmatic approach to the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS), says a Syrian businessman with close ties to the government. Even from the early days the regime purchased fuel from ISIS-controlled oil facilities, and it has maintained that relationship throughout the conflict. “Honestly speaking, the regime has always had dealings with ISIS, out of necessity.”

...The businessman cites Raqqa’s mobile phone service as an example of how there is commerce between the regime, Syrian businesses, and ISIS. The country’s two main mobile phone operators still work in Raqqa. “Both operators send engineers to ISIS-controlled areas to repair damages at the towers,” he says. In addition, there are regular shipments of food to Raqqa. “ISIS charges a small tax for all trucks bringing food into Raqqa [including the businessman’s trucks], and they give receipts stamped with the ISIS logo. It is all very well organized.”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10585391/Syrias-Assad-accused-of-boosting-al-Qaeda-with-secret-oil-deals.html>

The Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad has funded and co-operated with al-Qaeda in a complex double game even as the terrorists fight Damascus, according to new allegations by Western intelligence agencies, rebels and al-Qaeda defectors.

Jabhat al-Nusra, and the even more extreme Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shams (ISIS), the two al-Qaeda affiliates operating in Syria, have both been financed by selling oil and gas from wells under their control to and through the regime, intelligence sources have told The Daily Telegraph.

Rebels and defectors say the regime also deliberately released militant prisoners to strengthen jihadist ranks at the expense of moderate rebel forces. The aim was to persuade the West that the uprising was sponsored by Islamist militants including al-Qaeda as a way of stopping Western support for it.

The allegations by Western intelligence sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, are in part a public response to demands by Assad that the focus of peace talks due to begin in Switzerland tomorrow be switched from replacing his government to co-operating against al-Qaeda in the “war on terrorism”.

Intelligence gathered by Western secret services suggested the regime began collaborating actively with these groups again in the spring of 2013. When Jabhat al-Nusra seized control of Syria’s most lucrative oil fields in the eastern province of Deir al-Zour, it began funding its operations in Syria by selling crude oil, with

sums raised in the millions of dollars.

“The regime is paying al-Nusra to protect oil and gas pipelines under al-Nusra’s control in the north and east of the country, and is also allowing the transport of oil to regime-held areas,” the source said. “We are also now starting to see evidence of oil and gas facilities under ISIS control.”

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-steps-up-oil-and-gas-sales-to-assad-regime-1484835563>

<https://www.oilandgas360.com/islamic-state-steps-oil-gas-sales-assad-regime/>

Islamic State Steps Up Oil and Gas Sales to Assad Regime

Islamic State has ramped up sales of oil and gas to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, U.S. and European officials said, providing vital fuel to the government in return for desperately needed cash.

The regime’s purchases are helping sustain Islamic State amid unprecedented military pressure on the militant group in both Syria and Iraq. It is also helping the group despite the regime’s insistence that it is dedicated to eradicating the militant group with the help of its top allies Russia and Iran.

Oil-and-gas sales to Mr. Assad’s regime are now Islamic State’s largest source of funds, replacing revenue the group once collected from tolls on the transit of goods and taxes on wages within its territory, the officials said.

...Islamic State captured a host of Syrian and Iraqi oil fields and gas facilities after it took over much of northern Iraq and large parts of Syria in 2014. The group continued selling oil to Iraqi and Syrian buyers, including the Assad regime, bringing in up to \$1 million a day.

That amount has fallen because of sustained aerial bombing by Russia and the U.S.-led international coalition and anti-Islamic State ground operations in Iraq and Syria.

...Islamic State has found some relief from U.S. airstrikes targeting their oil-smuggling operations in central and western Syria, where the Russian military has a heavy air presence, a Western official said. The group is also harder to hit in Syria because the pockets of territory it controls are smaller, the official said.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/syria-isis-have-been-ignoring-each-other-battlefield-data-suggests-n264551>

Syria's military and ISIS may be sworn enemies but instead of wiping each other off the battlefield they have been delicately dancing around each other, according to new data exclusively obtained by NBC News.

Both sides in the bloody conflict appear to be eliminating smaller rivals ahead of a possible final showdown.

Around 64 percent of verifiable ISIS attacks in Syria this year targeted other non-state groups, an analysis of the IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center's (JTIC) database showed. Just 13 percent of the militants' attacks during the same period — the year through Nov. 21 — targeted Syrian security forces. That's a stark contrast to the Sunni extremist group's operations in Iraq, where more than half of ISIS attacks (54 percent) were aimed at security forces.

JTIC's data shows that his counterterrorism operations — more than two-thirds of which were airstrikes — skew heavily towards groups whose names aren't ISIS. Of 982 counterterrorism operations for the year up through Nov. 21, just 6 percent directly targeted ISIS.

Henman said the figures suggest ISIS and Assad’s security forces have embraced the "clever strategy" of

mostly “ignoring each other.”

For now, ISIS appears focused on emerging as the dominant Islamist, non-state actors and operating in areas where Assad's troops have largely withdrawn. Assad is focused on destroying opposition to his rule from the same groups ISIS wants to dominate — and engaging more in recent months with ISIS as that comes to pass.

“They both recognize there’s a mutual benefit in crushing other groups,” Henman said. That's because eventually ISIS is going to have to take on Assad's government — and both sides want the battlefield to be clear of other potential competitors.

...Just ask Abu Hafs, a local ISIS leader from Aleppo who is intent on expanding the militants' Islamic state —or caliphate.

"We are not ignoring the Syrian regime but we are focusing on the rebel areas," he explained to NBC News. "You can't jump to step two. You have to do the first step first. To fight successfully against Bashar Assad's regime, we must first take over the rebel areas."

Some rebels suspect coordination between the Syrian regime and ISIS. Yusuf Abu Abdullah, one of the leaders of the Al-Mujaheddin Army in Aleppo, said when his fighters have attacked regime bases, they have come under separate attacks from ISIS. That's forced them to withdraw and battle the other militants instead of Assad's forces.

"Most of the front lines between ISIS and the regime are very quiet — you wouldn't even hear the sound of firing," he said. "The exact opposite is on our frontlines, which are very dangerous and where the fights don't stop for 24 hours."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-usa-idUSKBN0OI13D20150602>

The United States has accused the Syrian military of carrying out air strikes to help Islamic State fighters advance around the northern city of Aleppo, messages posted on the U.S. Embassy Syria official Twitter feed said.

Islamic State fighters pushed back rival insurgents north of Aleppo on Sunday near the Turkish border, threatening their supply route to the city, fighters and a group monitoring the war said.

Fighters from Levant Front, a northern alliance which includes Western-backed rebels and Islamist fighters, said they were worried Islamic State was heading for the Bab al-Salam crossing between Aleppo and the Turkish province of Kilis.

"Reports indicate that the regime is making air strikes in support of ISIL's advance on Aleppo, aiding extremists against Syrian population," a post on the U.S. Embassy Syria Twitter account said late on Monday, using an acronym for Islamic State

Syrian officials have previously dismissed as nonsense allegations by Washington and Syrian opposition activists that the Syrian military has helped Islamic State's fight against rival Syrian insurgent forces.

"The Syrian army is fighting Islamic State in all areas where it is present in Syria," a military source said.

<http://www.newsweek.com/how-syrias-assad-helped-forge-isis-255631>

How Syria's Assad Helped Forge ISIS

Mohammed Al-Saud is under no illusions. “In 2011, the majority of the current ISIS leadership was released from jail by Bashar Al Assad,” he said. “No one in the regime has ever admitted this, or explained why.” Al-Saud, a Syrian dissident with the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, left Syria under threat of arrest in 2011.

Others were not so lucky. In 2006, Syrian Tarek Alghorani was sentenced to seven years in jail for the contents of his blog.

...“The situation in there was like the middle ages. There were too many people and not enough space. There wasn’t enough water to drink. There wasn’t enough food to eat and what there was would have been ignored by dogs in the street. Torture was an everyday reality. After years in there, all of those people became Salafists and in a bad, bad way.”

His fellow prisoners were members of ISIS. “Abu Muhammad al-Joulani, (founder of the Jihadist group, Jabhat al-Jabhat al-Nusra) was rumored to be there. Mohammed Haydar Zammar, (one of the organisers of the 9/11 attacks) was there. This is where the Syrian part of ISIS was born,” he said.

Alghorani is convinced that members of ISIS were released strategically by Assad. “From the first days of the revolution (in March 2011), Assad denounced the organisation as being the work of radical Salafists, so he released the Salafists he had created in his prisons to justify the claim ... If you do not have an enemy, you create an enemy.”

Fellow Syrians agree. “The regime did not just open the door to the prisons and let these extremists out, it facilitated them in their work, in their creation of armed brigades,” a former member of the Syrian Security Services told the Abu Dhabi newspaper, the National, on condition of anonymity in January this year.

“The regime knew what these people were. It knew what they wanted and the extent of their networks. Then it released them. These are the same people who are now in Iraq,” Al-Saud added.

“In jail, you have leaders, then you have leaders of leaders. Things form their own structure,” Alghorani recalled. “When these guys were released they all became leaders. They all developed their own followers. My jail was an academy for radical Salafist fighters.”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10585391/Syrias-Assad-accused-of-boosting-al-Qaeda-with-secret-oil-deals.html>

...after the invasion of Iraq, he helped al-Qaeda to establish itself in Western Iraq as part of an axis of resistance to the West; then when the group turned violently against the Iraqi Shias who were backed by Assad’s key ally, Iran, he began to arrest them again.

As the uprising against his rule began, Assad switched again, releasing al-Qaeda prisoners. It happened as part of an amnesty, said one Syrian activist who was released from Sednaya prison near Damascus at the same time.

“There was no explanation for the release of the jihadis,” the activist, called Mazen, said. “I saw some of them being paraded on Syrian state television, accused of being Jabhat al-Nusra and planting car bombs. This was impossible, as they had been in prison with me at the time the regime said the bombs were planted. He was using them to promote his argument that the revolution was made of extremists.”

Other activists and former Sednaya inmates corroborated his account, and analysts have identified a number of former prisoners now at the head of militant groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIS and a third group, Ahrar al-Sham, which fought alongside Jabhat al-Nusra but has now turned against ISIS.

One former inmate said he had been in prison with “Abu Ali” who is now the head of the ISIS Sharia court in the north-eastern al-Qaeda-run city of Raqqa. Another said he knew leaders in Raqqa and Aleppo who were prisoners in Sednaya until early 2012.

These men then spearheaded the gradual takeover of the revolution from secular activists, defected army officers and more moderate Islamist rebels.

Syrian intelligence has historically had close connections with extremist groups. In an interview with The Daily Telegraph after he defected, Nawaf al-Fares, a Syrian security chief, told how he was part of an operation to smuggle jihadist volunteers into Iraq from Syria after the 2003 invasion.

Aron Lund, editor of a website, Syria in Crisis, used by the Carnegie Endowment to monitor the war, said: “The regime has done a good job in trying to turn the revolution Islamist. The releases from Sednaya prison are a good example of this. The regime claims that it released the prisoners because Assad had shortened their sentences as part of a general amnesty. But it seems to have gone beyond that. There are no random acts of kindness from this regime.”

Rebels both inside and outside ISIS also say they believe the regime targeted its attacks on non-militant groups, leaving ISIS alone. “We were confident that the regime would not bomb us,” an ISIS defector, who called himself Murad, said. “We always slept soundly in our bases.”

Assad's (and to a lesser extent, Russias) tacit support for ISIS is oft reported in the context of discrediting their opposition and drawing international support for the regime. But it less often considered what this support means for the rest of the world.

Assad's tactics have created the largest refugee crisis in recent history:

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/06/middleeast/syria-weapons-against-civilians/index.html>

These methods of warfare are so grotesque, they're banned by international law.

Airstrikes on civilian hospitals. Barrel bombs that kill and maim indiscriminately. Chemical attacks that suffocate children with their eyes still open.

But these are the threats Syrian civilians face every day. An estimated 90,000 to 120,000 civilians have been killed since the war began six years ago.

...The methods are as diverse as they are horrific. Here are a few:

Chemical weapons

The 86 people killed in a chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun this week were likely exposed to neurotoxic agents, the international aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) said.

...US military and intelligence officials said Syrian planes dropped bombs at the same time and place that the chemical attack reportedly happened. Officials said they followed the radar track of regime planes and the infrared heat signature of the bombs.

But Tuesday's attack wasn't the first chemical attack that killed Syrians, nor was it the deadliest. In 2013, another chemical attack in Syria killed about 1,400 people. A UN report found that sarin gas had been used on

civilians in that attack.

Airstrikes on hospitals

...the regime has repeatedly committed that war crime, medical experts and Syrian activists have said.

The largest surgical hospital in Syria's largest city was bombed twice in four days last year. Aleppo's M10 hospital was struck by a "torrent" of weapons, including two barrel bombs, two cluster bombs and at least one rocket, a spokesman for the Syrian American Medical Society said last October.

That same week, another Aleppo hospital was struck.

...Barrel bombs

They are one of the most gruesome ways of killing and maiming civilians.

These bombs typically consist of barrels stuffed with explosives and objects, such as nails or shrapnel, to maximize carnage after the barrel explodes.

In 2014, at least 25 children were killed when barrel bombs fell on their elementary school, the opposition group Local Coordination Committees of Syria said.

The crude weapons are typically dropped from helicopters and are banned by international law because they kill and maim indiscriminately.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/13/about-six-in-ten-syrians-are-now-displaced-from-their-homes/>

About six-in-ten Syrians are now displaced from their homes

Conflict in Syria has displaced millions of citizens from their homes since protests against the al-Assad government began more than five years ago. An estimated 12.5 million Syrians are now displaced, amounting to about six-in-ten of the country's 2011 midyear population – and up from less than 1 million in 2011, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of global refugee data.

The displacement of Syrians is unprecedented in recent history for a single country, our analysis of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data found.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/worst-humanitarian-crisis-since-world-war-ii/>

The worst humanitarian crisis since World War II

The Syrian refugee crisis is the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. And we think people should know more about it.

Of the 4 million refugees, the vast majority are women and children. And nearly 3 million of those children are out of school with no hope of returning to any formal education.

But the chaos has opened up opportunities for terrorist groups like ISIS to infiltrate refugee groups and seed terrorist "cells" throughout the world:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-europes-migrant-crisis-became-an-opportunity-for-isis/2016/04/21/ec8a7231-062d-4185-bb27-cc7295d35415_story.html

SALZBURG, Austria — On a crisp morning last October, 198 migrants arrived on the Greek island of Leros, all of them seemingly desperate people seeking sanctuary in Europe. But hiding among them were four men with a very different agenda.

The four were posing as war-weary Syrians — all carrying doctored passports with false identities. And they were on a deadly mission for the Islamic State.

Two of the four would masquerade as migrants all the way to Paris. There, at 9:20 p.m. on Nov. 13, they would detonate suicide vests near the Stade de France sports complex, fulfilling their part in the worst attack on French soil since World War II.

...European security officials say they think that the Islamic State has seeded terrorist cells on the continent over the past year and was able to do so in part because the European Union failed to come to grips with a migrant crisis that opened a funnel for the militant group.

Europe is now working with Turkey to bar its doors, ending the waves of irregular migration that washed over the continent last year. But more than a million migrants — a record — have already entered. Hundreds of thousands of them, European intelligence agencies say, may have done so without thorough checks at their entry point: Greece.

The vast majority of migrants were genuinely fleeing war and poverty. But over the past six months, more than three dozen suspected militants who impersonated migrants have been arrested or died while planning or carrying out acts of terrorism. They include at least seven directly tied to the bloody attacks in Paris and Brussels.

The Islamic State is gloating that they have far more lying in wait.

“We have sent many operatives to Europe with the refugees,” an Islamic State commander said in an interview over an encrypted data service. “Some of our brothers have fulfilled their mission, but others are still waiting to be activated.”

<http://www.politico.eu/article/german-intelligence-warns-of-is-hit-squads-among-refugees/>

German intelligence warns of ISIL ‘hit squads’ among refugees

German intelligence services have evidence that “hit squads” from the Islamic State terror group have infiltrated the country disguised as refugees, the deputy head of Bavaria’s spy agency told the BBC Thursday.

“We have to accept that we have hit squads and sleeper cells in Germany,” Manfred Hauser, the vice president of the Bavaria region’s intelligence gathering agency, BayLfV, told the Today program.

“We have substantial reports that among the refugees there are hit squads. There are hundreds of these reports, some from refugees themselves. We are still following up on these, and we haven’t investigated all of them fully,” said Hauser.

<https://www.numbersusa.com/news/cia-director-isis-trying-infiltrate-us-through-refugee-program>

CIA Director: ISIS is Trying To Infiltrate The U.S. Through Refugee Program

While updating the Senate intelligence committee today, CIA Director, John Brennan, said that ISIS is training operatives and attempting to enter the U.S. through “refugee flows, smuggling routes and legitimate methods of travel”.

Brennan continued, “Unfortunately, despite all of our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the groups terrorism capability and global reach. The resources needed for terrorism are modest. The group would have to suffer even heavier losses on territory, manpower and money for the terrorist capacity to decline significantly.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/28/world/isis-attacks.html>

Defeat of ISIS Could Send ‘Terrorist Diaspora’ to West, F.B.I. Chief Says

Eventual victory against the Islamic State could well lead to an uptick of terrorist attacks in the West, not a reduction in them, James B. Comey, the director of the F.B.I., said on Wednesday.

“At some point there is going to be a terrorist diaspora out of Syria like we’ve never seen before,” Mr. Comey said at a cybersecurity conference at Fordham University. “Not all of the Islamic State killers are going to die on the battlefield.”

Mr. Comey predicted that the military coalition would eventually succeed in crushing the Islamic State, but that “through the fingers of that crush are going to come hundreds of really dangerous people and they are going to flow primarily to Western Europe.” But some, he said, could well end up in the United States.

If the extent of Syrian intelligence infiltration of the terrorists is as wide as has been reported, that means the refugee crisis has helped Syrian intelligence and their allies gain a foothold throughout the world. Syria is said to use its clout with terrorist groups in their opponent's countries as a way to influence those countries:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/world/middleeast/07syria.html>

...The report also criticized the Syrians for funneling money to Sunni insurgent groups inside Iraq “in a bid to increase Syrian influence.”

Syria has long had a regional strategy of influencing its neighbors’ politics by harboring their opposition groups. Washington imposed economic sanctions on Syria in 2004 for, among other things, its support of Hamas and several other militant Palestinian groups.

To the extent that Russian intelligence collaborates with (or infiltrates) Syrian intelligence, this means the “terrorist diaspora” has also given Russian intelligence opportunities to use terrorists to influence other countries. Such activities would not be new to them:

<https://www.rferl.org/a/soviet-islamist-terrorism-israel-america-disinformation-pacepa/25034290.html>

The authors claim the operation, code-named SIG, was launched in 1972 and involved sending thousands of agents of influence into the Arab and Islamic world to foster anti-American and anti-Israel sentiment. Some of the agents were drawn from among the Muslim minorities of the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries.

...“Before I left Romania for good in 1978, [Romania's foreign intelligence service] had sent around 500 such undercover agents to various Islamic countries. Most of them were religious servants, engineers, medical

doctors, teachers, and art instructors," Pacepa told RFE/RL.

"According to a rough estimate received from Moscow, by 1978 the whole Soviet bloc intelligence community had sent around 4,000 such agents of influence to the Islamic world.

...For example, Pacepa and Rychlak write that the KGB facilitated the translation and distribution of thousands of copies of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a forged tsarist-era, anti-Semitic pamphlet that purported to describe plans for Jewish domination of Europe.

The book also alleges that the KGB assisted and trained groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in planning and executing terrorist attacks.

There are some indications Russian intelligence have been using terrorism to try to strong-arm or punish other countries recently, which could be the subject of a subsequent write-up.

Regardless, it is clear that the fight against ISIS would not be over were they to be defeated in Syria. The rest of the world would still need to stop Assad, and perhaps Russia, from supporting and influencing terrorists throughout the world.

This is why Trump's recent ceasefire deal is problematic. It looks like the deal mostly relieves pressure and Putin and Assad and opens-up opportunities for them.

The ceasefire was put in place in a limited area of Syria, where Western-backed rebels have been fighting Assad:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/us/politics/syria-ceasefire-agreement.html>
July 7, 2017

WASHINGTON — The United States, Russia and Jordan have agreed to foster a cease-fire in a limited area of southwestern Syria

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-russia-agree-to-collaborate-backing-cease-fire-in-southwest-syria/2017/07/07/2fcfb5e-633b-11e7-a4f7-af34fc1d9d39_story.html
July 7

...The cease-fire is to take place in and around the southwestern city of Daraa, in a part of Syria where the front lines are more cleanly drawn and have been relatively stabler between Russian-backed forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and U.S.-backed opposition fighters than elsewhere in the country.

<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/07/17/537679035/heres-what-to-know-about-the-trump-putin-syria-cease-fire>

Here's What To Know About The Trump-Putin Syria Cease-Fire

July 17, 2017 1:59 PM ET

Is this different from previous cease-fire efforts?

Past cease-fires — there have been four other attempts since February 2016 — collapsed due to a lackluster

commitment from the warring sides. But this time, Russia, a powerful ally of the Damascus regime, seems focused on a lasting freeze in the violence.

Moscow has said it would be willing to dispatch military police to Syria to patrol the cease-fire lines. "That's a level of investment, a level of risk-taking that we haven't seen before," said Faysal Itani, senior fellow at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

For Russia, this is part of a wider effort to establish "de-escalation zones" in the country that would ultimately stabilize Syria while keeping the regime of Bashar Assad in power.

But the rebels are fractured, and do not have as much mobility as Assad's forces and the Iranian militias supporting his regime. Partial ceasefires like this allow Assad to focus his forces and eliminate rebel strongholds one by one:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-russia-agree-to-collaborate-backing-cess-fire-in-southwest-syria/2017/07/07/2fcfb5e-633b-11e7-a4f7-af34fc1d9d39_story.html

Syrian opposition supporters in Daraa expressed skepticism about the agreement.

"There have been deals and truces before, but the regime forces never committed to any of these deals," said Iyad al-Rifai, an optician who lives in Daraa. "On the contrary, they always try to take advantage of the truce deals to advance."

<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/07/17/537679035/heres-what-to-know-about-the-trump-putin-syria-cess-fire>

Here's What To Know About The Trump-Putin Syria Cease-Fire

July 17, 2017 1:59 PM ET

...But in this cynical war, cease-fires are also an opportunity for the most powerful warring side — in this case, the regime and its allies, including Russia — to reorganize and redeploy forces. Damascus has used the quiet in the southwest to move troops up to eastern Ghouta, a suburb of the capital where opposition groups still have a strong foothold.

<http://time.com/4640640/eastern-ghouta-syria-damascus-assad-peace-talks/>

The Damascus Suburb That Could Be the Next Key Front in Syria's War

Jan 23, 2017

With a population as high as 450,000 people, Eastern Ghouta is larger than the rebel enclave in the eastern half of Aleppo, which fell to government forces and allied militias in December. Already encircled by pro-Assad forces, Eastern Ghouta is sustained by an elaborate network of smuggling tunnels that connect the area to the regime-held areas. The tunnels ease the effects of the blockade, providing vital goods to the people inside the enclave, and enriching smugglers, rebels, and government officials thought to be involved in smuggling.

Assad's regime is expected to seek a negotiated settlement with rebel groups inside Eastern Ghouta in hopes of convincing them to surrender, rather than launching another massive military campaign along the lines of the onslaught on eastern Aleppo last year.

The suburb has already endured years of intense bombardment by Assad's forces. It was also the site of the

pivotal 2013 chemical weapon attack that killed more than a thousand people and prompted the Obama administration to threaten military action against the Assad regime. Still, experts believe Assad would prefer that the rebels in the region surrender through negotiations.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/air-strikes-kill-10-syria-eastern-ghouta-sohr-170716043617281.html>
16 July 2017

Air raids kill 10 in Syria's Eastern Ghouta: SOHR

UK-based monitor SOHR describes Friday's assault as deadliest in opposition-held Eastern Ghouta region since April.

...The assault took place in the eastern Ghouta region, which has been partially besieged by the Syrian government since 2013.

Located about 15km outside of Damascus, the region is the biggest remaining opposition bastion in the Syrian capital's suburbs.

SOHR said several people were seriously injured and the death toll was expected to rise.

In recent weeks, government forces have been heavily bombarding Ein Terma, which links the eastern Ghouta area to the opposition-held Damascus neighbourhood of Jobar, according to SOHR.

...According to SOHR, Friday's air raid is the biggest loss of life in the eastern Ghouta region since April when 18 people were killed in an attack on Saqba.

In 2013, the Syrian government banned civilians from going into or out of the enclave, allowing only some food deliveries.

Eastern Ghouta is made up of 22 communities and has seen Russian and Syrian air attacks on markets, schools, and hospitals in many of them.

<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/07/17/537679035/heres-what-to-know-about-the-trump-putin-syria-cease-fire>

Issam al-Reis, a spokesman for the U.S.- and Jordan-supported Southern Front rebel group in southwest Syria, told NPR they would not stand idly by if the assault on eastern Ghouta continues.

"East Ghouta is our brother in the revolution," he said. "This may threaten the whole deal."

Meanwhile, Trump's deal has allowed Russian troops to secure the southwest front, taking pressure off Assad:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-russia-agree-to-collaborate-backing-cease-fire-in-southwest-syria/2017/07/07/2fcfb5e-633b-11e7-a4f7-af34fc1d9d39_story.html

Other U.S. officials said there was no intention of using U.S. troops on the ground as monitors or enforcers, although it was unclear who would do the job.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in a news conference after the Trump-Putin meeting, said that "at first, security around this de-escalation zone will be ensured by forces and means of Russian military police in

coordination with Jordanians and Americans.”

Later, at his own news conference, Tillerson said that “we have a very clear picture of who will provide the security forces. But we have a few more details to work out.” He declined to specify what those forces would be.

The senior official, briefing reporters in Washington, said that “we hope to have that finalized in the next couple of days. Let me leave it at that.”

Israel, however, has said it does not want Russian troops to deploy in the vicinity, according to a report Friday in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

The ceasefire came after a push by the Assad's forces to take Daraa and a key border crossing with Jordan there. When that push failed, the Syrian and Russian aircraft bombarded the city, leaving much of it uninhabitable. This may be an instance of Russia using immigration as leverage--Jordan fears an influx of refugees, and ultimately agreed to ceasefire in negotiations around the same time as the bombings:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-russia-agree-to-collaborate-backing-cease-fire-in-southwest-syria/2017/07/07/2fcfbfb5e-633b-11e7-a4f7-af34fc1d9d39_story.html

While it has been largely out of the public eye compared with other parts of Syria, the fighting in Daraa has claimed the lives of scores of people. The Syrian air force has been pounding the area with the barrel bombs that brought the rebels to surrender in Aleppo last year. Large parts of rebel-controlled areas have been reduced to rubble.

Russian aircraft also have conducted bombing operations around Daraa in support of Syrian forces.

Daraa province lies along the western end of Syria’s lengthy border with Jordan, which fears a new influx of Syrian refugees. The government in Amman helped negotiate the deal and is one of the signatories, along with Moscow and Washington.

That Putin would push for the ceasefire is no surprise. Exploiting carefully timed ceasefires (and in this case, carefully placed) to gain a military advantage is not new to Russian intelligence:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Marshall#Post_War:_China

In December 1945, President Harry Truman sent Marshall to China, to broker a coalition government between the Nationalist allies under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Communists under Mao Zedong. Marshall had no leverage over the Communists, but he threatened to withdraw American aid essential to the Nationalists. Both sides rejected his proposals and the Chinese Civil War escalated, with the Communists winning in 1949. His mission a failure, he returned to the United States in January 1947. Chiang Kai-shek and some historians later claimed that cease-fire, under pressure of Marshall, saved the Communists from defeat. As Secretary of State in 1947–48, Marshall seems to have disagreed with strong opinions in The Pentagon and State Department that Chiang's success was vital to American interests, insisting that U.S. troops not become involved.

https://books.google.com/books?id=Csbuugc_rE0C

Chiang Kai-shek saw the Second Battle of Siping in this context: as a part of the war to defend China against the imperialist ambitions of the Soviet Union, in which the Chinese Communist forces were merely Stalin's

stooges. This was a war that Chiang had lost in 1949, but which might have come out very differently, Chiang argued, if the Second Battle of Siping and its aftermath had been handled differently. The battle itself, Chiang said, had been "another decisive battle against the Communist troops." As he described it, the three hundred thousand men under Lin Biao's command had been utterly defeated: "More than half the Communist effectives became casualties." Reports from the front, he said, "all agreed that barring some special international complications the Chinese Communists would not be able to fight anew after the terrific punishment they had just taken at the hands of the Government forces."

Then there came the ceasefire and the suspension of Du Yuming's pursuit of the Communist forces. Chiang believed that if his armies had continued their pursuit, "Communist remnants in northern Manchuria would have been liquidated." Without a base area in northern Manchuria, the remaining Communist forces in Manchuria would have been deprived of Soviet support and "a fundamental solution to the problem of Manchuria would have been at hand." Instead, "the moral of Government troops in Manchuria began to suffer" and Lin Biao rebuilt his forces in northern Manchuria. "The subsequent defeat of Government troops in Manchuria in the winter of 1948," said Chiang, "was largely due to the second ceasefire order." In this view, Siping was the decisive battle that could have been--if only a ceasefire, negotiated by George Marshall, had not intervened. Defeat had been snatched from the jaws of victory.

...Chiang did not explicitly blame George Marshall for his failure to follow up on the "decisive battle" of Siping. Indeed, Chiang portrays himself as the prime mover behind the ceasefire, in which he, acting out of a misplaced confidence in the better side of human nature, had generously given the Chinese Communists "another chance to prove their loyalty to the nation"--a generosity of spirit which, he saw afterward, had been a mistake.

For now, it looks like Putin and Assad are using the ceasefire to focus on other areas, but they could also use it to regroup and attack later with a stronger force. The rebels are not the only ones who suspect this:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/07/17/537679035/heres-what-to-know-about-the-trump-putin-syria-cease-fire>

...In a further complication to Trump's ambitions, on Sunday, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, took the unusual step of publicly attacking the cease-fire, saying Israel was "utterly opposed" to it.

...Israel fears Russia may not be willing or able to enforce the cease-fire. And if that is the case, it could see hostile, Iranian-funded fighters ultimately occupy the territory near its border.

...For the moment, Hezbollah and its allies are concentrating their firepower in eastern Syria — far from the current cease-fire area. Analysts say the groups are working to open a land route through Iraq and Syria through which they can be directly supplied.

Iran was not party to the current cease-fire negotiations. And if it succeeds in the east, some analysts warn that a strengthened Hezbollah may ultimately be tempted to storm toward the Israeli border.

However they use the ceasefire, it is clear that to thwart international terrorism and end the humanitarian crisis in Syria, the world needs to put pressure on Putin and Assad or oust Assad for good (it's doubtful most of the Syrian refugees would want to return home with Assad in power, for one). Instead, Trump has taken pressure off Assad and afforded them opportunities to launch focused attacks on the rebels.

It would be particularly egregious if Putin and Assad exploited the ceasefire to clear-out the rebels before launching any sort of serious effort against ISIS. But since Assad has influence with ISIS and relies on them for

drawing international support for his regime, the prospects are dim that Putin and Assad will attack ISIS instead of the rebels.

This is compounded by the relative lack of attention in Western media to the Syrian conflict. Intelligence states like Putin's regime and Assad's regime will generally do whatever they can get away with, but recently U.S. media has focused most of its attention on various meetings between Trump's camp and Putin's. Without knowing what was discussed in those meetings there isn't much to talk about. But for Trump and Putin's July 7th meeting we do know what they talked about, and Trump's deal from that meeting helped further Putin's goals.

Ultimately, Trump's actions will likely help further international terrorism. The terrorist threat will not be over so long as the terrorists have backers. These backers are Putin and Assad.