Oils, foes, new allies?

By EDAN LANDAU

During the past few months, we have witnessed what can only be perceived as a strategic change in US foreign and defense policy. Part of this change is the emergence of new alliances, but mainly in reassessment of military needs and capabilities as well as the will to combat terrorism. If past goaless and meek armings of moderate rebel armies on the terrorists’ turf, we should expect today’s goals to be contain and engage by ethnic divide.

The US has changed the range of threats it faces; if in the past 15 years Iran and the Hezbollah were at the center of the threat matrix, which also included global jihad groups and rogue states, today they are viewed by the US intelligence community as a threat only to US allies, and maybe a potential partner in fighting these organizations and reigning in these regimes in the name of stability.

Articles by Reuters and other major media outlets indicate the US has considered secret talks with Iran dating back to March 2013 behind the backs of their key ally in the region, specifically Saudi Arabia and Israel. The revelation of these conversations has exposed a crisis of confidence expressed through drastcic statements by those affected, which called for an end to a self-sustained attack against the Iranian nuclear program made by Israel, and a halt to co-operation to prevent the terrorist operations on the part of the Saudi government. The US government responded with well-placed leaks to the media, a so-called armistice, and statements and threats regarding the Palestinian negotiations and re-exposing Saudi Arabia’s involvement in the 9/11 attacks.

The issue of the involvement of high-ranking Saudi officials in the attacks has been discussed in the past, raising questions about the current timing of the reformation of the issue. Recently, the Saudi monarchy awarded a $3 billion grant to the Lebanese military – almost twice its annual budget – in the absence the money not be spent on US hardware.

The issue of the US alliance with Saudi Arabia is also relevant to the ongoing Syrian civil war. Prior to September 2013, the US demanded that Syrian President Bashar Assad be removed from power, and even encouraged the use of force to punish the Syrian regime for the use of chemical weapons. That position was coordinated with the Saudis and includes the training and arming of moderate rebel forces. However, resistance to use force, and the halt to supplies of technological means to rebel forces, because of fear the supplies would fall into the wrong hands, has pushed Saudi leaders to announce the formation of a joint group for most Islamic organizations (excluding ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra). The change in US strategy has also led to the west turning its back on its pre-condition to unseat Assad.

Another change is the US approach toward Hezbollah. The past few months have seen an increase in reports in Middle East media outlets such as the Komati Al-Bai and al-Anba, regarding contacts between the US government and Hezbollah. Some of these reports go as far as to describe direct talks between the two. Moreover, during the summer months, there have been several reports regarding indirect CIA warnings to Hezbollah of pending attacks. Finally, US State Department spokespersons have reiterated that they have no objection to Hezbollah – a designated terrorist organization – taking part in a new Lebanese government if it contributes to the stability of the region, and most importantly, a recognition to an earlier statement dating back to the previous government formation in June 2011.

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The US administration believes that its alliance with Saudi Arabia is to counter terrorism. It is because the United States’ policy is to counter terrorism. It is because the US government views Iran as an ally and the US military is not interested in a military conflict. The US has opted to punish those forces for using non-democratic methods.

In the context of the US to reach a military decision and political weakness, the US has led the Obama administration to change its approach towards the Middle East and specifically Saudi Arabia. The US government is not interested in a military conflict. It has not learned from the mistakes of the First Afghan war in the 1980s and wrongly believes that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

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