

Strange bedfellows

Egypt's press has a peculiar theory as to why the West will intervene in Syria

Amid the tempest over Syrian chemical weapons, an irony stands out. After two decades of bloody struggle between the West and al-Qaeda's global jihadist franchise, those bitter adversaries suddenly find themselves fighting on the same side. As Western countries threaten retaliatory strikes against Bashar Assad's regime for its apparent use of poison gas, al-Qaeda's Syrian branch also promises a "volcano of revenge".

Just another shake of the pieces in an increasingly baffling Middle East puzzle? No, says the pro-government press in Egypt, where conspiracy theorists have grown ever more strident since the coup in July that toppled Muhammad Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood. The apparent surprise-realignment over Syria, they claim, simply tears the veil from a long-standing Zionist-American-Muslim Brotherhood plot, exposing a diabolical plan to divide and weaken Israel's most powerful Arab neighbours, one by one.

First, of course, say the conspiracy theorists, was Iraq, where the crippling result of America's 2003 invasion is plain. Now Syria, riven by sects and falling to pieces, awaits air strikes set to deliver the coup de grâce. But the big prize for the wicked West in league with al-Qaeda is, beyond a doubt, Egypt.

Here, the cabal of Israeli, Western and Islamist plotters set out to foment sectarian strife, and to install a Muslim Brotherhood government that would divide the country into two, perhaps four, weakened micro-states. Only the Egyptian army's timely intervention and the strong hand of the police and intelligence services have saved the ancient nation from a dismal fate. But the plotters have not given up: Egypt remains under threat.

As proof, Egypt's best-selling daily, the privately owned al-Masry al-Youm, last week published a document purporting to be the original minutes of a recent secret meeting at an American base in the German city of Darmstadt. Intercepted by a brilliant Egyptian undercover operation, the document revealed a plan to subvert Egypt's government, wreck its economy and stop the flow of the Nile using dams in Ethiopia "just as we succeeded in controlling the Euphrates valley with dams in Turkey". The plotters agreed, among other things, that to achieve a level of chaos similar to Iraq and Syria, Egypt would require a "death rate" of perhaps 12,000 a month.

Oddly enough, this document was in Arabic, a language not used by any of the six powers supposedly represented: Israel's intelligence service, Mossad; America's National Security Agency; NATO's high command; and security men from Britain, France and Germany. Strangely, this bombshell has produced no official response from any of the relevant governments, including Egypt's.

This has not deterred the state-owned daily al-Ahram, long considered Egypt's newspaper of record, from publishing yet more details of another supposed conspiracy. Quoting a range of retired Egyptian security officials, the paper's August 27th and 28th editions suggested that Egypt faces a treacherous fifth column. A group of businessmen, journalists and politicians in the service of Western intelligence agencies is plotting to weaken the country, said the sources.

Luckily, their plan to split Egypt into southern and northern halves has been foiled through the vigilance of security agencies. And luckily, too, patriotic Egyptians are aware of the need to close ranks to combat a vicious psychological war to undermine their country. A senior judge, Esam Abul Ela, summed up the situation. "American imperialism and some European elements believe the best way to maintain their regional interests is to undermine Egypt's political and economic stability," he told al-Ahram. This is why these evil powers insist that the Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian liberals must both keep on taking part in politics, thus ensuring the chaos that apparently makes Westerners happy.

Fonte: The Economist, London, v. 408, n. 8851, p. 42, 31 Agu. a 6 Set. 2013.