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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Israel girds for Golan war with Iran, Hezbollah

By Ed Blanche

BEIRUT, Lebanon -- Amid the carnage of Syria's civil war, well into its sixth year, Is-raeli military chiefs say that Iran and its prized proxy, Hezbollah, are surrepti-tiously seeking to establish a new front in an older conflict, the Iran-backed group's 30-year war against the Jewish state that until recently was waged almost exclusively from neighboring Lebanon.

The center of this strategy, which Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasral-lah, has frequently espoused in recent months, is the Golan Heights, a 1,000-meter-high volcanic plateau that overlooks northern Israel. It has been a battleground since biblical times.

Israel seized the western two-thirds of the heights in the 1967 Mid-dle East war and annexed it in 1981. It refuses to surrender this occupied enclave from where it has the Syrian capital, Damascus, within the range of its artillery.

The Golan has also acted as a buffer zone that protects Israel from any spillover from the war raging in Syria. However, if the Israelis are correct, that may be changing, with the Tehran regime, which with Rus-sia dominates Syrian military strat-egy, using Hezbollah to establish a new forward base against the Jewish state.

"Like other foreign and domestic actors, Hezbollah has seized on the Syrian civil war to improve its position in the country and the surrounding region," the U.S.-based global security consultancy Stratfor observed in an April 6 analysis.

Stratfor amplified recent reports that Hezbollah has been setting up bases on the Golan and in other parts of southern Syria where it has strong forces on the ground sup-orting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad just as its patron Iran does.

If Assad manages to stay in power, he will likely have to surrender control of the Golan to Iran and Hezbollah to threaten Israel.

The efforts by Hezbollah "to expand and solidify its control in Syria will only increase in the future," Stratfor noted.

Satellite imagery recently showed that Hezbollah has built up a major base outside Qusair, a town near Syria's border with Lebanon, which Hezbollah forces stormed in June 2013 in their first major engagement in the Syrian war.

According to Stratfor, Hezbol-lah plans use Qusair to stockpile weapons, including artillery pieces, short-range rockets and mortars along with about 60 T-72 tanks it ac-quired in the Syrian fighting.

There are reports that long-range ballistic missiles — including Iranian-built Shahabs and Fateh-110s — have been deployed at Qusair, although satellite imagery has not confirmed this.

Senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps officers report-edly inspect the Qusair base frequently and, according

to Stratfor, treat it "as an Iranian asset," part of Hezbollah's plans to keep a permanent force of 3,000 fighters or more in Syria.

Since January 2013, the Israelis have mounted as many as 10 airstrikes to destroy advanced weaponry moving from Syria to Lebanon for Hezbollah, supposedly including Russian-made air-defense missile systems that could pose a serious threat to Israel's long-held control of the skies over Syria and Lebanon at a stroke.

The most recent such strike was on April 25, 2015. There have been none since the Russians installed advanced S-300 air-defense systems around the airbase they have built near Latakia since their September 2015 intervention in Syria, although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared the operations to block weapons deliveries to Hezbollah would continue.

That could ignite a new conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, which last went to war in 2006 when Hezbollah fought Israel's vaunted military to a standstill.

But these days, Hezbollah, which has seen an estimated 1,200 fighters killed and three times that many wounded in Syria since 2012, has its hands full and is not looking for another fight with Israel right now.

However, the 2006 war ended badly for Israel, which failed in its objective to crush Hezbollah and suffered an unprecedented monthlong bombardment of about 4,000 missiles and most analysts are convinced that both sides see it as "un-finished business."

A July 16 threat assessment by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a right-leaning Washington think-tank, observed that "the next war between Israel and Hezbollah will likely not be confined to the Lebanese-Israeli border. Hezbollah will try to shift some of the weight of the battle to Syria and the Golan Heights.

"Indeed... Hezbollah and Iran plan to connect the Golan Heights to the terror group's South Lebanon stronghold — to make it one contiguous front against Israel."

This concept has been given some weight in recent months as Iran's IRGC and Hezbollah have established bases in the Syrian-controlled sector of the Golan amid an uptick in violence that has triggered Israeli action directed primarily at Hezbollah and the IRGC.

On Jan. 18, 2015, an Israeli Apache helicopter gunship fired missiles into a convoy carrying IRGC and Hezbollah commanders on a reconnaissance sweep near the Golan's largely deserted capital, Quneitra.

Among the dead were an IRGC brigadier-general, Mohammad Allah Daddi, a ballistic missile specialist, and three Hezbollah leaders: Abu Ali Reza, a senior field commander, and Mohammed Issa, who was understood to have been overseeing the setting up of missile bases on the Golan.

Hezbollah also lost Jihad Mughniyeh, eldest son of Imad Mughniyeh, the group's long-time military chief who was assassinated in a Damascus car bombing on Feb. 12, 2008, supposedly a joint operation by the CIA and Israel's Mossad intelligence service.

Syrian sources said Allah Daddi had overall charge of building four missile bases near the border with Israel.

Israel's Channel 2 television re-reported that Issa was responsible for coordinating the transfer of missiles from Syria and Iran as well as Hezbollah's arsenal in Lebanon. Reza was considered a central Hezbollah figure whose mission was to plan an offensive on Israel's northern border in any future conflict, including overrunning the Galilee region.

Israel, as usual, did not acknowledge the attack but there seems little doubt that the targeted group was known to the Israelis and that the airstrike was intended as a particularly sharp warning to Iran and Hezbollah.

Iranian leaders reportedly telephoned Nasrallah urging him not to retaliate for the loss of so many commanders in one action so as to avoid triggering a major conflict, as he had done in July 2006 with a cross-border raid in which five Israelis were killed and two captured.

Possibly with the destructive consequences of that war in mind, and not wishing to fight Israel while engaged in heavy fighting in Syria, Nasrallah did not retaliate in force.

On Dec. 19, 2015, Samir Kuntar, a Lebanese Druze Muslim who joined Hezbollah while imprisoned in Israel for killing a Jewish family in a Palestinian raid in 1979, was killed along with several Hezbollah commanders in a nighttime missile strike on his apartment building in the Damascus suburb of Jaramana.

Kuntar, who spent nearly three decades behind bars, was released in 2008 in an exchange with Hezbollah for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers whose capture triggered the 2006 war.

At the time of his death, Kuntar was tasked with recruiting Syrian Druze living in the Golan region into an Iranian-controlled militia to fight the Jewish state.

In the next war, which many see coming, Israel is preparing to fight a very different enemy. Hezbollah may have suffered heavy casualties in Syria but it has also learned how to fight conventional wars, with armor and artillery and maneuvering big battalions across strange terrain rather than the small-scale actions that constituted most of its combat against Israel between 1982 and 2000.

USGS urges Kansans to prepare for earthquakes like Californians

by The Extinction Protocol

September 2016 – WICHITA, Kan. (KWCH) Oklahoma's largest earthquake ever still has people talking. Saturday's 5.8 magnitude earthquake caused only minor damage in Kansas, but officials with the US Geological Survey say it's time for people in the region to start preparing for earthquakes like Californians. Items on your wall or shelves can be hazardous in an earthquake, but there are ways you can protect yourself and your belongings. "It scared me this time," said Errica Weaver. The jolt from the quake felt across the region didn't skip Weaver's home.

"I ran down the hallway and woke my husband up and I was like 'we're having another earthquake'," said Weaver. Weaver says the earthquake shook pictures off her wall, and caused drawers to slide out of her bedroom dresser. We took Weaver through the FEMA Earthquake Home Hazard Hunt, a guide to eliminate potential dangers in your home in the event of an earthquake. FEMA recommends you securely fasten or relocate heavy pictures over beds and furniture. We checked Weaver's home and all wall hangings are in safe places. Another suggestion is to secure cabinets to wall studs, and use latches to keep cabinet doors from flying open during an earthquake. Weaver says that's something she'll have to fix in her own home. FEMA also recommends strapping down TVs and other expensive or hazardous electronics. FEMA emphasizes making sure all heavy objects are secured inside your home. There are also steps you can take outside the home, such as making sure your house is anchored to its foundation. –KWCH

Pakistan announces first-ever war games with Russia; Pakistan, China, Russia axis looms

by Utopia: the Collapse
east-vs-west

September 2016 – PAKISTAN - Pakistan, India's arch rival and China's most powerful ally in Asia, has announced its first ever joint military exercises with Russia later this year. The small scale military exercise named "Friendship 2016" will involve only 200 military personnel from both sides. Pakistan's Ambassador to Moscow Qazi Khalilullah described the exercise as the first time the militaries of both countries will hold a joint military drill.

The name Friendship 2016 itself is ominous, suggesting a growing of the military relations between both countries that before were bitter Cold War foes on account of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The announcement of the Pakistani-Russian war game quickly follows on the heels of report India and the United

States will hold its “Yudh Abhyas 2016” joint military exercise from Sept. 14 to 27. This drill will be the twelfth staging of this joint exercise hosted alternately by India and the U.S. It will take place at the settlement of Chaubattia in the Almora District of Uttarakhand State in northern India, which shares a long border with China.

The move comes amidst increasing defense ties between Moscow and Islamabad as the latter was also thinking to buy advanced Russian warplanes. Khalilullah didn't reveal any details about the nature of the exercises, where in Pakistan it will take place and where. He did, however, state this historic event was a reflection of the increased cooperation between the two countries. “This obviously indicates a desire on both sides to broaden defense and military-technical cooperation,” he said. Over the last 15 months, the chiefs of Pakistan's Army, Navy and Air Force have travelled to Russia to bolster military-to-military ties. The high-level exchanges between the two nations resulted in a deal in Aug. 2015 for the sale of four MI-35 attack helicopters to Pakistan.

The formal agreement was considered a major policy shift on the part of Pakistan following the growing strategic partnership between the U.S. and India. Analysts said Pakistan wants to boost its ties with Russia to diversify its options in the event its relations with Washington sour any further.

Analysts said Pakistan wants to boost its ties with Russia to diversify its options in the event its relations with Washington sour any further. Just last week, Maj. Gen. Naveed Ahmed, Director General of Defense Procurement Pakistan, said the Pakistan Armed Forces has a keen interest in Russian air defense systems, tanks, arms and ammunition. Ahmed led the Pakistan delegation on the Army-2016 in Russia that ended last week. “Our army services are (showing) keen interest in different Russian products,” he said. “We are looking for the air platform; for any sorts of helicopters. For the army, we are looking for tanks. We are looking for anti-tank weapon system and more importantly we are looking for the air defense system.” -Yibada

The Kremlin believes Hillary Clinton will start a war with Russia

by Utopia: the Collapse

September 2016 – MOSCOW - If Hillary Clinton is elected president, the world will remember Aug. 25 as the day she began the Second Cold War. In a speech last month nominally about Donald Trump, Clinton called Russian President Vladimir Putin the godfather of right-wing, extreme nationalism. To Kremlin-watchers, those were not random epithets. Two years earlier, in the most famous address of his career, Putin accused the West of backing an armed seizure of power in Ukraine by “extremists, nationalists, and right-wingers.” Clinton had not merely insulted Russia's president: She had done so in his own words.

Worse, they were words originally directed at neo-Nazis. In Moscow, this was seen as a reprise of Clinton's comments comparing Putin to Hitler. It injected an element of personal animus into an already strained relationship - but, more importantly, it set up Putin as the representative of an ideology that is fundamentally opposed to the United States. Even as relations between Russia and the West have sunk to new lows in the wake of 2014's revolution in Ukraine, the Kremlin has long contended that a Cold War II is impossible. That's because, while there may be differences over, say, the fate of Donetsk, there is no longer a fundamental ideological struggle dividing East and West. To Russian ears, Clinton seemed determined in her speech to provide this missing ingredient for bipolar enmity, painting Moscow as the vanguard for racism, intolerance, and misogyny around the globe.

The nation Clinton described was unrecognizable to its citizens. Anti-woman? Putin's government provides working mothers with three years of subsidized family leave. Intolerant? The president personally attended the opening of Moscow's great mosque. Racist? Putin often touts Russia's ethnic diversity. To Russians, it appeared that Clinton was straining to fabricate a rationale for hostilities. I have been hard-pressed to offer a more comforting explanation for Clinton's behavior - a task that has fallen to me as the sole Western researcher at the Russian Foreign Ministry's Moscow State Institute of International Relations. Better known by its native acronym, MGIMO, the institute is the crown jewel of Russia's national-security brain trust, which Henry Kissinger dubbed the “Harvard of Russia.”

In practice, the institute is more like a hybrid of West Point and Georgetown's School of Foreign Service: MGIMO prepares the elite of Russia's diplomatic corps and houses the country's most influential think tanks. There is no better vantage point to gauge Moscow's perceptions of a potential Hillary Clinton administration. Let's not mince

words: Moscow perceives the former secretary of state as an existential threat. The Russian foreign-policy experts I consulted did not harbor even grudging respect for Clinton. The most damaging chapter of her tenure was the NATO intervention in Libya, which Russia could have prevented with its veto in the U.N. Security Council. Moscow allowed the mission to go forward only because Clinton had promised that a no-fly zone would not be used as cover for regime change.

Russia's leaders were understandably furious when, not only was former Libyan President Moammar Gadhafi ousted, but a cell phone recording of his last moments showed U.S.-backed rebels sodomizing him with a bayonet. They were even more enraged by Clinton's videotaped response to the same news: "We came, we saw, he died," the secretary of state quipped before bursting into laughter, cementing her reputation in Moscow as a duplicitous warmonger. As a candidate, Clinton has given Moscow déjà vu by once again demanding a humanitarian no-fly zone in the Middle East - this time in Syria. Russian analysts universally believe that this is another pretext for regime change. Putin is determined to prevent Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from meeting the same fate as Gadhafi - which is why he has deployed Russia's air force, navy, and special operations forces to eliminate the anti-Assad insurgents, many of whom have received U.S. training and equipment. —Chicago Tribune

Hospitals in England are on the brink of collapse

Denis Campbell Health policy editor Sunday 11 September 2016

The body that represents hospitals across England has issued a startling warning that the NHS is close to breaking point because of its escalating cash crisis.

Years of underfunding have left the service facing such "impossible" demands that without urgent extra investment in November's autumn statement it will have to cut staff, bring in charges or introduce "draconian rationing" of treatment – all options that will provoke public disquiet, it says.

In an unprecedentedly bleak assessment of the NHS's own health, NHS Providers, which speaks for hospital trust chairs and chief executives, tells ministers that widespread breaches of performance targets, chronic understaffing and huge overspends by hospitals mean that it is heading back to the visible decline it last experienced in the 1990s.

"Taken together this means the NHS is increasingly failing to do the job it wants to do and the public needs it to do, through no fault of its own," Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, writes in the Observer.

His intervention comes days before the influential Commons health select committee decides whether to launch a special inquiry into the state of the NHS in England. After months dominated by the Brexit debate, the state of the NHS is now emerging as the key domestic challenge facing Theresa May's government.

NHS Providers chief executive: 'We are under the greatest pressure in generations'

Recalling the NHS's deterioration in the 1990s, which caused political problems for John Major's government, Hopson adds: "NHS performance rarely goes off the edge of a cliff. As the 1990s showed, instead we get a long, slow decline that is only fully visible in retrospect. It's therefore difficult to isolate a single point in that downward trajectory to sound a warning bell. But NHS trust chairs and chief executives are now ringing that bell. We face a stark choice of investing the resources required to keep up with demand or watching the NHS slowly deteriorate. They are saying it is impossible to provide the right quality of service and meet performance targets on the funding available. Something has to give."

In a direct appeal to May to increase NHS funding in the autumn statement in November, Hopson warns the government will face "unpalatable choices" if the service is to keep within the existing budget. "The logical areas to examine would be more draconian rationing of access to care, formally relaxing performance targets, shutting services, extending and increasing charges, cutting the priorities the NHS is trying to deliver or, more explicitly, controlling the size of the NHS workforce," says Hopson.

His warning comes days after the NHS posted its worst set of performance figures for services such as A&E,

planned operations and ambulance response times.

Hopson blames the “full-blown crisis in social care” created by cuts to town hall budgets for causing “major problems for the NHS”, such as record numbers of healthy patients who cannot be discharged because social care is not available. This means that “hospitals are now being asked to routinely run at capacity levels that risk patient safety”.

Norman Lamb, the Liberal Democrat MP who was a health minister in the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, said Hopson’s “absolutely accurate reflection” of life on the frontline showed that “the government is in total denial about the reality of the state of the NHS and that they continue to mislead”.

“Ministers refer to ‘£10bn extra’, which to many people will seem a lot of money. But that £10bn is being stretched in a number of directions, including to pay for the seven-day NHS. Everyone who has looked into the finances of both the NHS and care system knows that this is nowhere near enough. We are the world’s fifth or sixth largest economy so it’s really horrendous that, despite our relative wealth, we have a health and social care system that is on its knees,” he added.

Chris Ham, the King’s Fund’s chief executive, said: “The clear message from the NHS leaders, doctors and nurses I’ve spoken to is that they are increasingly unable to cope with rising demand for services, maintain standards of care and stay within their budgets.

“The government must be honest with the public about what the NHS can deliver with the funding it has been given. It is simply not realistic to expect hard-pressed staff to deliver new commitments like seven-day services while also meeting waiting-time targets and reducing financial deficits.”

A government spokesman said: “We know the NHS is under pressure because of our ageing population, but we rightly expect the service to continue to ensure that patients get treated quickly.”