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Secret US-Hizballah talks. Washington plans to include Lebanon, Syria deals in Iran nuclear pact

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US in secret talks with Hassan Nasrallah

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas' initiation of a unity pact with the Hamas extremists last week did not come out of the blue. It was prompted by the direct contacts the Obama administration has secretly established with the Lebanese Hizballah. Abbas reasoned that if Washington can start a dialogue with a terrorist organization, so too can his own PLO and Fatah.

debkafile's Washington sources report that the Obama administration appears to have carried over to Lebanon the doctrine set out by the late Richard Holbrooke for Afghanistan, whereby dialogue with Taliban should be made the centerpiece of

Washington's strategy for US troop withdrawal. Holbrooke's influence on Secretary of State John Kerry dated back to his run for the presidency in 2004.

In Lebanese terms, Hizballah's Hassan Nasrallah has become the equivalent of Taliban's Mullah Mohammad. Hizballah has scored high in the Syrian war. Its military intervention on the side of Bashar Assad in the last year is credited with turning the Syrian army's fortunes around from near defeat in 2013 to partial triumph in key areas of Syria this year. Nasrallah is able to boast that his movement's commitment to the Syrian conflict is its central mission and will remain so until rebel and al Qaeda forces are finally vanquished.

What the Hizballah leader is trying to put across, in terms of the Holbrooke doctrine, is that like Mullah Omar in Afghanistan, he, Nasrallah, holds the key to resolving the Syrian civil war.

The Obama administration bought this premise and decided to apply it to broadening the rapidly progressing dialogue with Tehran to related areas. The plan developed in Washington was to seize the momentum of the nuclear track and ride it to a broad US-Iranian understanding that embraces a comprehensive nuclear accord with Tehran as well as understandings for resolving the Syrian and Lebanese questions.

Administration officials figure that Nasrallah heeds no one but the ayatollahs in Tehran. He may talk big but he knows that his fate is in the hands of his Iranian masters. If Iran decides it is time for him to go, it will be curtains for him. His involvement in the Syrian war is considered to be contingent on the strategic decisions of Iran's leaders. (He was a lot less confident in the winter of 2013 when Hizballah's home bases were being smashed in lethal suicide bombings.)

Iran also determines which weapons are supplied to the Hizballah units fighting in Syria, in which sectors they fight and how to respond to his pleas for reinforcements.

In Washington's view, Hizballah's involvement in the Syrian war has increased its leader's dependence on Tehran. He accordingly has little room for maneuver in contacts with US representatives and if he turns difficult, they are sure they can turn to Tehran to force him in line.

It is also believed in administration circles that the secret Saudi exchanges with Tehran (first revealed by DEBKA Weekly) will eventually produce Riyadh's acceptance of Hizballah as a

dominant factor in Syria and Lebanon.

However, many Middle East experts find the US take on Hizballah to be naïve and simplistic and strongly doubt that the path it has chosen will bring Nasrallah – or Tehran - around to serving America's will or purposes. They draw a parallel with the underlying US assumptions which ultimately led the Palestinians-Israeli talks off track.

But expectations of the Hizballah track are high and strongly guide the actions of President Obama, John Kerry, National Security Advisor Susan Rice and CIA Director John Brennan. And so, in early March, the first secret rendezvous took place in Cyprus between CIA officers and Hizballah intelligence and security operatives.

According to a number of Mid East intelligence sources, two such meetings have since been conducted and initial US-Hizballah understandings reached relating to the volatile situations in Syria and Lebanon.

Our intelligence sources add that US Ambassador to Beirut David Hale has been in charge of preparing these meetings and implementing the understandings reached.

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