With Syrian armed forces having liberated the outskirts of Damascus, East Ghouta and the Palestinian refugee camps of Yarmouk, the time has come for them to launch an offensive into the south-western province of the Daraa, which served as the so-called cradle of Syria’s “color revolution” launched by Qatar and a number of other Persian Gulf monarchies back in 2011.

The southern direction is of particular significance, since Idlib in the north is part of the Turkish de-escalation zone, with attack in that direction possibly triggering clashes between Syrian and Turkish troops. As for possible advancements towards Al-Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor, those are virtually impossible, as Kurdish forces of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) enjoy US “protection.” The restoration of government control over Daraa is of particular importance for Damascus, as it will bring to an end plans aimed at the creation of the Hauran emirate planned by Saudi Arabia and Israel, and will also allow the Syrian government to open the Damascus-Amman route with the resumption of Syrian and Iraqi exports to Jordan.

Such a scenario has already become the cause of serious concern in Jordan, particularly in regards to a possible influx of refugees into the Hashemite Kingdom. The country already has been sheltering over a million refugees from Syria, reaching a limit beyond which any additional migration wave might result in a humanitarian catastrophe threatening Jordanian political stability. Additionally, Amman cannot stomach the idea of pro-Iranian Shia militant groups or members of Hezbollah advancing so close to the Syrian-Jordanian border.

Recently, Jordanian political elites have been trying to normalize their relations with Damascus, while placing particular emphasis on restoring economic ties, making attempts to open a trade route from Syria to Jordan,
On May 21, Jordanian Ministry of Information released a memo stating that Amman welcomes the establishment of control over Daraa by the Syrian government, but at the same time opposes the participation of pro-Iranian Shia armed formations and military advisers in the military operation aimed at establishing said control. It’s been noted that in such an even the resistance of Sunni tribes living in the Dara’a Governorate may become more stubborn. So it’s no wonder that Amman positively received the statement that both Russia’s president Vladimir Putin and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad made during their meeting that that stipulated that all foreign troops and armed formations must be withdrawn from Syria. However, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad on May 23, in an interview with the Sputnik News agency, excluded Iranian military advisers and Shia armed groups from this list of such foreign troops, adding that the two presidents were referring to the armed forces of aggressor states including the US and Turkey. Iranian and Iraqi Shia detachments or those of the Lebanese Hezbollah, are excluded since they arrived in Syria at the behest of Damascus. In this regard, Mikdad laid great hopes for the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey in the hope that “more sane politicians will come to power in Ankara”.

The fact that the military operation in Daraa is in preparation is no longer a secret to anyone. The Al-Masdar agency has gone as far as to release a draft overview of the operation. Damascus is confident that it will be able to convince many militants to surrender and then be relocated to the north. Syrian armed forces would then move in to take care of ISIS “pockets” in southwest Daraa. Naturally, no one really knows what will happen when the fighting begins. It’s true that unpleasant surprises are a possibility, but the main consideration is the composition of forces that are already gathering in Damascus to take back the Dara’a Governorate. There are no pro-Iranian Shia detachments in this task force, with the Syrian government taking efforts to use instead every unit that could be described as local formations. The published composition of the grouping is as follows: The Fourth Division, the 39th Brigade, the 40th Brigade, the 42nd Brigade, the 5th Armored Division, the 15th Brigade, the 9th Assault Brigade, the 15th Special Forces Division, the Forces the 105th Brigade, the 106th Brigade, Liv Al-Quds, the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), the National Defense Forces (NDF), the Arab Nationalist Guard, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP), and the Al-Baath Battalions. Naturally, part of the units, although bearing the names of brigades, are at best incomplete battalions. The “assembled task force” includes armed Palestinian groups and even detachments of traffic police. The actual strength of this force reaches 15,000, which, in fact, raises a question of whether or not these forces will be up to the task. It seems that victory can only be achieved through massive artillery and air bombardment, with every attempt to be made along the way to minimize troop losses.

Apparently, the absence of Shites is a result of agreements between Iran and Israel, which were made during meetings in Amman and which managed to reach an agreement that the operation in Darra will under no circumstances be carried out by Shia pro-Iranian groups. That’s the condition that Tel Aviv put forward before guaranteeing its non-interference. However, should clashes threaten its territory or the now-occupied Golan Heights zone, then Israel is expected to respond.

Iran may be tempted to intervene if the operation appears to be failing, and thus provide an opportunity for Israel to once again make moves. Still, the composition of the task force looks minimal in strength, considering that during the third phase of the operation it will be forced to engage ISIS head-on, and right next to the Golan Heights, where Syrian forces can be caught in a possible armed response from Israel. On the other hand, Assad and the Iranians simply have nowhere to go while there is a respite, during which the United States coalition and a number of Arab countries with the secret participation of Israel are preparing for a war with Iran on Syrian and Iraqi territory. They need to free up as many forces and means as possible for this conflict. The calculation of Israel in this case is understandable: regardless of the outcome of the operation in Daraa, its opponents will become substantially weakened.
According to experts, the offensive in Daraa will be launched soon.  

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