

In the Wake of Debacle, Washington Signals a “Policy Shift” in Syria. Why The Change in Tactics?

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The sheer hubris of a bully would not allow him to acknowledge defeat and give up a botched plan to loot, hurt or murder. Instead, in the face of failure or a precarious position, he would try to wiggle his way out of the adverse situation in order to regain strength and prepare for another attack in an opportune time.

The U.S. call in recent weeks for negotiations in Syria follows a similar pattern: in the face of the debacle of its policy in Syria, it is now signaling to shift the gears of its war machine from the plan to overthrow the Syrian government to “negotiations and a political settlement”!

From the time it embarked on the criminal mission of *regime change* in Syria nearly five years ago, the U.S. and its puppet and mercenary allies rejected all attempts to negotiate with the government of President Bashar Al-Assad or its geopolitical allies Russia and Iran. Now, all of a sudden, it is calling for negotiation with these same adversaries in pursuit of “de-escalation” and a political deal that would not include President Assad’s immediate removal from power. The long-term strategic goal of removing him from power, however, remains unchanged; it is simply postponed. It would be fulfilled consequent to a negotiated political settlement, or at the end of a “transitional period.”

Why the change of tactics? What prompted the shift of the gears of the war juggernaut?

A major factor behind the Obama administration’s call for negotiation is the disastrous failure of its policy to overthrow the government of President Assad by proxy forces that are armed, trained and funded by the U.S. and its allies. While the number of its mercenary forces, the so-called “moderate” opposition, is dwindling to literally a handful, the ranks and reach of the Frankenstein (the ISIS) that the U.S. and its partners have created are expanding. And while the anti-Assad coalition has recently been significantly weakened following the refugee crisis and hesitations of European “partners” to continue with the agenda of regime change in Syria, the position of the Assad government and its Russian, Iranian and Hezbollah supporters has been strengthened.

These humiliating developments were recently acknowledged by (among others) the head of U.S. Central Command General Lloyd Austin in a congressional testimony in which he admitted that a year after it was launched at a cost of \$500 million, the Pentagon’s program to recruit and train a “moderate” U.S. proxy fighting force in Syria had been able to field a grand total of “four or five” fighters inside the country.

Another factor behind the Obama administration’s call for negotiations has been the realization that even if the Assad government is overthrown, the successor powers would

most probably be much worse than those now roaming Libya following the criminal overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

A further factor that has contributed to the U.S. readiness for negotiation is the refugee crisis. The crisis—The heart breaking scenes of death and desperation, the daunting task of resettling the refugees and the resulting tensions that have been created in Europe and other “host” countries—has effectively exposed to the entire world the brutality of the U.S. policy of regime change as the culprit of the incalculable disaster.

An additional contributory factor to the U.S. call for negotiations seems to be its plan or hope to coopt the Western-oriented government of President Rouhani of Iran, thereby weakening or undermining the support for the Syrian government. Considering the Rouhani administration’s eagerness to please the U.S. and other Western powers, this is not a far-fetched hope or plan on the part of the United States.

The U.S. claims that its direct interference in Syria nearly five years ago was prompted by the defense of a “democratic” uprising against the “dictatorial” rule of the Assad government. Irrefutable evidence shows, however, that plans of regime change in Syria (and elsewhere in the region) had been drawn much earlier. Let us take a brief look at those earlier plans of regime change.

A Brief Historical Background

Under the two-camp, or two-bloc, world order of the Cold War era most of the world countries were divided between the U.S. and Soviet camps. Accordingly, a number of the Arab/Muslim countries in the broader Middle East and North Africa that aspired to independence from colonial/imperial domination of their countries aligned themselves with the Soviet Union, overthrew the old monarchical allies of Western powers, adopted the Soviet “Non-capitalist” or “Arab socialist” paths of economic development, and instituted extensive welfare state programs. These included Syria and Iraq under the Baathist regimes, Egypt under the late Jamal Abdel Nasser and Libya under Muammar Gaddafi.

Other Muslim/Arab regime, however, survived the anti-colonial, anti-imperial national liberation movements of the 1920s–1960s years and continued to remain in the U.S. camp. These included all of the current U.S. allies in the region, as well as Iran until the 1979 revolution, which overthrew the U.S.-allied monarch, known as the Shah of Iran.

Taking advantage of the Soviet support, the “enlightened dictators” in Damascus, Baghdad and Tripoli implemented extensive nationalizations of the infrastructural or strategic industries and put in place wide-ranging social safety-net welfare programs. They also challenged the imperialistic agendas of Western powers in the region. In addition, they challenged the expansionist policies of the Zionist regime in Israel and called for its withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories. These pro-Soviet modernizing nationalist leaders also often poked fun at the unreformed, incorrigible kingdoms and sheikhdoms such as Saudi Arabia for being historically obsolete and politically dependent on the imperial Powers of the West.

Not surprisingly, all these three groups of countries—the Western powers, their Arab/Muslim allies in the region and the colonial settler state of Israel—intensely detested the pro-Soviet nationalist leaders ruling Syria, Iraq and Libya. However, they could not do anything about it as long as the Soviet Union was in existence.

Also not surprisingly, soon after the demise of the Soviet Union, that is, in the early 1990s, the U.S. began to draw plans of replacing these “unfriendly,” “rogue states” with “friendly” or “moderate” ones—hence the official entry of the terms “rogue states” and/or “regime change” into the lexicon of the U.S. foreign policy.

The demise of the Soviet Union and demands for the so-called *peace dividends* in the United States, that is, demands for the conversion of a portion of the military to non-military social spending, provided an added urgency for the beneficiaries of war dividends to find or invent new “threats” in place of the “communist threat” of the Cold War era in order to fend off peace dividends. Beneficiaries of war and militarism, the military-industrial-intelligence-security complex, argued that the new, post-Cold War threats came from “rogue states,” “global terrorism,” “enemies of democracy,” and “radical Islam” which, they contended, were more “dangerous” than the communist threat of the Soviet era, as they were unpredictable and unreliable.

Early in 1990, the White House unveiled a new National Security Strategy before the Congress that focused on “unpredictable turbulent spots in the Third World” as new sources of attention for the U.S. military power in the post-Cold War era: “In the new era, we foresee that our military power will remain an essential underpinning of the global balance . . . that the more likely demands for the use of our military forces may not involve the Soviet Union and may be in the Third World, where new capabilities and approaches may be required” [1].

Proponents of war and militarism unabashedly offered the strategy of regime change, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, as an effective way to counter the “threats” of the post-Soviet multi-polar world.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, a number of militaristic think tanks (such as The American Enterprise Institute, Project for the New American Century, America Israel Public Affairs Committee, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, National Institute for Public Policy, and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs) published a number of policy papers that clearly and forcefully advocated plans for border change and/or regime change in the Middle East.

For example, in 1996 an influential Israeli think tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, sponsored and published a policy document titled “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm” which, among other things, presented a plan whereby Israel would “shape its strategic environment,” beginning with the removal of Saddam Hussein and the installation of a Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad, to serve as a first step toward eliminating the anti-Israeli governments of Syria, Lebanon and Iran [2].

It follows from this brief historical overview that Powerful beneficiaries of militarism need war and military adventures abroad in order to win the financial war at home, that is, the war over budgetary allocation of tax dollars, or the national/Federal budget.

However, while the beneficiaries of war dividends need military adventures, wars of regime change and geopolitical convulsions, they also need to keep such wars and military adventures manageable, that is, to keep them under control at the local or regional levels so that they would not become cataclysmic world wars on the scale of WW I or WW II, as this would destroy or paralyze global financial/economic markets, thereby hurting the war-mongers’ own vital interests.

This explains the occasional imperialist calls for negotiations with their nemeses when their wars of choice threaten to get out of hand and place global markets and international business in jeopardy—hence, the recent U.S. call for negotiations in Syria.

The Purpose of Negotiations

As already noted, the United States' new approach to the war in Syria is essentially tactical: the long-term or ultimate strategy of regime change remains unchanged.

Reflecting the purely tactical nature of the change in the approach to Syria, the *New York Times* reported on 28 September 2015 that "There are intense discussions underway on how long that transitional period should be and how many in Mr. Assad's close circle would have to go, several United Nations Security Council diplomats said."

In a similar vein, President Obama recently indicated (in his 90-minute talk with President Putin in New York) that while any long-term arrangement had to include the removal of Assad from power, he can for now remain as president during an unspecified "transitional period."

In essence, what President Obama is asking President Assad (through the proposed negotiations) boils down to this: "since we could not or cannot overthrow your government by force, we will put off that task for now until we are ready to do so at a later date. In the meantime, we can negotiate and explore various ways of how best to accomplish this"!

Although no details of the proposed negotiations are revealed, one can fairly confidently surmise what the U.S. would offer or try to accomplish during the envisioned negotiations and/or transitional period. It would most probably offer a period of ceasefire, or "cessation of hostilities," during which time the Syrian government forces would be asked to pull back from their strategic or advantageous positions at the war front. However, while asking government forces to de-escalate, the U.S. and its allies would not agree to disarm and disband the various mercenary groups they have been training, arming and funding.

At the same time the U.S. would also try to undermine or weaken the Russian and Iranian support for the Assad government by promising them some vague or unspecific economic sanctions relief. This strategy could prove to be somewhat successful as both President Rouhani of Iran and President Putin of Russia, especially President Rouhani, seem to be quite susceptible to falling for such promises or prospects of sanctions relief.

In the meantime, as the Syrian government and its supporters are kept busy with these and similar agendas of negotiations, the U.S. and its allies would surreptitiously regroup, reinforce and prepare for another attack—an attack that would more likely focus on the use of "soft-power" tactics or tools to overthrow the government of President Assad. Such an attack could take the form of a color-coded revolution, a bogus elections ritual funded and orchestrated from abroad, and the like.

That's the essence or the goal of the proposed U.S. negotiations. And that has, indeed, been the pattern of its negotiations ever since it supplanted the British imperialism as the world's bully.

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[Development: The Case of Nasser's Egypt](#) (Praeger Publishers 1989). He is also a contributor to [Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion](#).

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[2] Stephen J. Sniegoski, "The War on Iraq: Conceived in Israel," http://www.thornwalker.com/ditch/snieg_conc1.htm; see also Ismael Hossein-zadeh, *The Political Economy of U.S. Militarism* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2007), Chapter 6.

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