

Putin Offers the US a Route to Sanity in the Middle East

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As the UN General Assembly meets, and the world awaits anxiously Russia's proposals for a solution to the Syrian conflict, it is important to keep in mind how we got into this position in the first place.

Before 2003 the Arab world was politically stable. The regimes that ruled the Arab world had all been in power for many years. Without exception they were repressive to varying degrees, were deeply conservative, and had a history of being allied to the US.

The progressive forces that in the 1950s and 1960s had been very strong in this region had — with US support — been repressed by the Arab regimes out of existence. This left Islam in its many manifestations as the only alternative to the regimes.



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The crisis we now see in the Arab world is the result of the US's deliberate policy of destabilising the Arab political system it had itself created in the 1960s and 1970s to destroy the progressive forces which because of their alignment with the USSR the US at that time considered the major threat to its control of the region.

This began in Iraq in 2003 when the US and Britain invaded and overthrew its government.

The US simultaneously announced its plan to overthrow the governments of Iran (which is not an Arab country) and Syria (the so-called "Axis of Evil").

Following Israel's defeat in a war in Lebanon in 2006, plans to overthrow the government of Syria began in earnest.

In 2009 the US supported protests in Iran aimed at overturning an election result in that country.

In the winter of 2011 protests caused two Arab leaders previously allied to the US, Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, to fall in quick succession. In both cases, the US signalled its withdrawal of support, which was instrumental in causing them to fall.

Over the course of 2011 the US and its allies Britain and France exploited protests against the Libyan government, and [misrepresented two UN Security Council Resolutions](#), to attack Libya and overthrow its government.

Over the course of 2011 the US also engineered the removal of the President of Yemen.

Lastly, during 2011 the US, following protests against the Syrian government, declared that government “illegitimate”, demanding the resignation of the country’s President.

Together with its allies the US repeatedly proposed to the Security Council Resolutions that would have cleared the way for a US attack on Syria. When these were [blocked by Russian and Chinese vetoes](#), the US together with its allies and in cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan and Turkey, supported a violent insurgency that sought the violent overthrow of the Syrian government by other means.

The consequence of these policies is that the entire region is now destabilised, Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen have collapsed into civil war, Egypt has experienced a military coup, and violent Islamic jihadists are on the rampage everywhere.

The US was not the sole agent in these events. In every case there were genuine popular grievances against the regimes. No one looking at the Arab world before 2003 would say its condition was satisfactory. It is wholly understandable and entirely legitimate that local people would want to change it.

The disaster is that the US manipulated this process to try to achieve a reordering of the Arab World in its own interests.

It appears to have convinced itself that the only thing that stood in the way of broader Arab recognition of its ally Israel was the same Arab dictatorships that in the 1960s and 1970s it had itself created.

Beyond that there seems to have been a kind of ideological messianism — [a belief that Western style liberal democracy would everywhere prevail because it is “the future”, and that it is both the right and the duty of the US to facilitate this process.](#)

US involvement however had the disastrous effect of militarising the whole process.

The governments of Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen were all open to negotiating with their opponents. Over the course of the wars in their countries the Libyan and Syrian governments repeatedly reached out to their opponents to look for a compromise.

That in both cases that failed is due to the US.

Having declared the governments of those countries “illegitimate” it rejected negotiations with them, insisting absurdly that they both go before negotiations could begin.

To have negotiated with governments the US had declared “illegitimate” would of course have been an admission that their removal was not inevitable, which was ideologically impossible.

The result was that negotiations were spurned, leading disastrously to war.

What made the consequences of this particularly toxic was that in the ideological vacuum created by the destruction in the Arab world of the progressive forces the US had itself sponsored, the only ones left to carry on the struggle against the regimes the US had

declared “illegitimate” were the violent Islamic jihadists the US was supposed to be opposed to.

Since the survival of the Libyan and Syrian governments was for the US “a crime against history” — and an unforgivable act of lese-majeste against the “hyperpower” — the US however showed no hesitation in allying itself with these people, despite evidence of their unpopularity, their quite exceptional brutality, their pathological hostility to the West, their continuous recourse to terrorism, their [physical destruction of ancient monuments](#), and the psychotic behaviour of many of their members — with [undisputed evidence of cannibalism](#) on the part of some of them.

In the ideological world view held by some people in the US, this was all forgivable as advancing the goal of the eventual “inevitable” pre-determined outcome: [a liberal order in the Arab world](#).

The result is the rise of the Islamic State, civil wars across the Arab world, massive refugee flows to Europe, and more threats of terrorism.

It has fallen to Russia to try to restore sanity by calling for the blindingly obvious: genuine negotiations without pre-conditions between the Syrian parties to end the conflict, and a united front by the entire world community to fight terrorism and the Islamic State.

There is no doubt this call commands overwhelming support — including from the US public, which has no interest in the utopian obsessions of the US’s own ideologues.

The [churlish reaction to this call of the US government](#) shows however what powerful sway these ideologues still have.

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