

Why the US Fears Arab Normalisation with Syria

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticised US President Joe Biden for meddling in Israeli affairs by warning against the current extreme right-wing government's plan to subjugate Israel's supreme court to control by the Knesset. This means subjecting the court to the authority of the government-of-the-day and its prime minister. The court serves as the sole check on the legislative branch and the combination of political factions which gain the majority in the Knesset.

Biden belatedly and reluctantly expressed concern about the overhaul once hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to protest, claiming curbing the Court would finish off Israel's flawed democracy which Washington claims ties Israel to the US. This claim is, of course, false, and hypocritical. Israel's "democracy" does not form the intimate connection between Israel and the US. Israel's constant meddling in US politics drives US policies on Israel, Palestine, and this region. The US Congress is so heavily dominated by pro-Israel politicians that critics refer to the US legislature as "Israeli-occupied territory".

This is why the Biden administration calls loudly upon Arab governments not to normalise relations with boycotted and sanctioned Syria. Last week, almost 40 US Syria experts and former officials urged the Biden administration to step up pressure on Arab governments to end reconciliation. "Unconditional regime normalisation is not inevitable," they wrote in a letter to Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken. "Opposing regime normalisation in word only is not enough, as tacitly allowing it is short-sighted and damaging to any hope for regional security and stability." What do they want Biden to do: Slap sanctions on Jordan, the Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Arab League?

It is bitterly ironic that these so-called "experts" in Syrian affairs should take this line since American meddling has been the main driver of regional insecurity and instability. Several of the figures who signed the letter have played roles in this destructive effort.

It is a joke to argue, as the letter does, that normalisation "erodes the international

community's capacity to shape a political process aimed at meaningfully resolving the crisis".

The authors call for "an alternative and actionable vision" for Syria. It is too late for "regime change" because the government of President Bashar al-Assad has control of 70 per cent of the country and Russia and Iran are determined to defend his government from internal and external threats.

If Assad were to be ousted, Syria could collapse into fighting fiefdoms established by local warlords. This is precisely what happened when Western powers intervened to ouster Muammar Ghaddafi in Libya which is now a fractured country without overall control and two competing, squabbling governments.

The expatriate Syrian National Council/Coalition promoted by the West has never amounted a serious alternative as it has no support inside Syria. Northwest Idlib province is ruled by Al Qaeda offshoot Hay' at Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) which enjoys the protection of Turkey. HTS sees Idlib as a base for exporting its ideology and sending adherents to this region and Europe.

While ignoring HTS and the dangers it poses, the US is determined to deploy its troops in northeast Syria, allegedly, to help the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces militia fight Daesh.

This is the largest stretch of territory which is not under government control and amounts to 25 per cent of the country. The US bases its troops around Syria's main oilfields, depriving Syrians of energy supplies which could run power plants and provide fuel for industries and vehicles. Syrians now have a few hours of electricity daily and petrol is rationed. Prices of essential foods are soaring due to inflation and the fall in the value of Syria's currency.

The US has slapped comprehensive sanctions on Syria, blocking reconstruction, driving 90 per cent of Syrians in the country below the poverty line, and depriving the current generation of Syrians of a decent future. The US fears that Arab normalisation with Syria will undermine the sanctions regime and enable the country to begin to recover from years of warfare and degradation by sanctions. The US and its Western collaborators have learned nothing from the devastation wreaked by warfare and sanctions on Iraq between 1990-2003 and the mismanaged, corrupt and corrupting US occupation.

Following the February 6th massive earthquakes in Syria and Turkey, the US poured unconditional relief into Turkey, while the US Treasury issued waivers to allow some aid into Syria as long as it was tightly monitored to ensure all relief supplies reached quake victims. Turkey is a sometimes US ally, Syria is definitely not.

As soon as it became independent from French colonial rule in 1947, Washington saw Syria as an irritant. The US mounted its first coup in the Eastern Arab world in 1949 against President Shukri Al Kuwatli. He was overthrown by Husni Al Zaim who enjoyed backing of from US Central Intelligence Agency's Miles Copeland and the then US ambassador in Syria. Kuwatly was seen by the US as too independent, particularly because he adopted a neutral posture in the Cold War between the US-led West and the Soviet Union and opposed the construction by US firms of the Trans-Arabian pipeline stretching from Saudi Arabia to south Lebanon. Zaim approved the pipeline four days after he seized power. He was ousted six months later and executed. A series of military coups followed, undermining Syria's early

democracy and setting the stage for decades of military rule.

Kuwatly was elected president again in 1955 and served until 1958 when Syria joined the United Arab Republic (UAR) and Gamal Abdel Nasser became president of Syria as well as of Egypt. This was a worst-case scenario for Washington. Nasser fought Israel, promoted pan-Arab nationalism, founded the Non-Aligned Movement with Yugoslavia's Tito and India's Nehru, and depended on the Soviet Union for arms and military advisers. The UAR was dissolved in a September 1961 coup by Syrian business figures and military men who revolted against the leftist, socialist system imposed on Syria by Egypt.

The fall of the UAR was followed by seven coups d'état until Hafez Assad and the Baath Party took power in 1971 and ruled for 30 years. He and his son, Bashar Assad, who succeeded have irritated the US by adopting a pro-Soviet, pro-Russian orientation, opposing Israel, and maintaining ties with Iran's clerical regime after the 1979 overthrow of the Shah, a US ally. Since unrest erupted in March 2011, The US has meddled in Syrian affairs by training anti-government militiamen (who failed to amount to much) and weaponising sanctions which have helped to drive 90 per cent of Syrians into poverty, deprived Syrians of food, fuel and medicine, and denied Syria investment and material to rebuild the country after years of warfare.

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Featured image: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's recent visit to UAE. (Source: [Mideast Discourse](#))

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