

## America's Syria Policy, Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia

Taj Hashmi

*“About ten days after 9/11, I went through the Pentagon .... and one of the generals called me in. He said, ‘We’ve made the decision we’re going to war with Iraq’ .... I said, ‘We’re going to war with Iraq? Why?’ .... He said, ‘I guess they don’t know what else to do.’ So I said, ‘Well, did they find some information connecting Saddam to al-Qaeda?’ He said, ‘No, no.’ He said, ‘There’s nothing new that way. They just made the decision to go to war with Iraq.’ He said, ‘I guess it’s like we don’t know what to do about terrorists, but we’ve got a good military and we can take down governments.’ And he said, ‘I guess if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem has to look like a nail.’”*

-- General Wesley Clark (ret), March 2, 2007

*“The implication is that Saudi backing for the Syrian rebels is part of a strategy to replace the Assad regime with a Sunni-dominated governance which might include Salafist elements. The presence of al-Qaida-linked paramilitaries in Syria may help to further the Saudi plan. Iran's efforts to prop up its Syrian ally reinforce the Riyadh-Tehran antagonism, as well as making the US even more determined to curb Iran's influence. Washington's strong support for its Saudi partner casts further doubt on the argument that its encouragement of the Syrian opposition has much to do with democracy.”*

-- Paul Rogers, “Syria, the Proxy War”, 14th June 2012

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## Overview

America has been obsessed with certain regimes in the Muslim World. The world has already witnessed the outcome of this obsession in the American-sponsored regime-changes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya. Of late, America is obsessed with two regimes in the Middle East, the Islamist regime in Iran and the Baathist regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Iran's alleged nuclear program and violation of human rights have been the main justifications for the possible US-Israeli invasion of the country to "de-nuclearize" and "democratize" it. America is obsessed with the Syrian regime for its alleged genocidal war against its own people. If American selective regime-change operation in the Muslim World is pushing the world towards prolonged intra- and inter-state conflicts in the coming decades is the most important question today. This paper appraises the role of America in intensifying world conflicts – directly or indirectly – through invasions or benign neglect of smaller countries. It aims at answering the questions a) Is the Muslim-West conflict a derivative of American imperialism? b) Are there better options for America? c) Can America be a dependable friend and partner-in-peace-and-progress of the Muslim World, not an adversary? The main argument of this paper is that while "global jihad" is a hackneyed cliché, not Muslims but America is posing the biggest threat to world peace by its armed and diplomatic interventions in the Muslim World. Iran and Syria are the latest in the long list of countries America has been contemplating to invade since 9/11. Meanwhile, the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has spelled out in unambiguous terms that if necessary, Israel alone would "tackle" Iran.

## The "Regime-Change": Perspectives and Ramifications

What famous French writer Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about America in his *Democracy in America* (1835) after visiting the country in the early 1830s is a classic. Many of his observations about America are still valid today. However, what he thought America would never do, build a large army and wage wars was no longer valid by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote: "The Americans have no neighbors, and consequently they have no great wars, or financial crises, or inroads, or conquest, to dread; they require neither great taxes, nor large armies, nor great generals; and they have nothing to fear from a scourge

which is more formidable to republics than all these evils combined, namely military glory”.<sup>1</sup> America has been at war with too many countries to mention here. Most of America’s wars have been unnecessary and anything but defensive at all. This chapter is an appraisal of America’s growing confrontational relationship with several Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, South Asia and beyond; and its short- and long-term ramifications.

Although “global jihad” is a problematic assumption, there is nothing so sensational about projecting the ongoing Muslim-West conflict as an extension of another “Hundred-Year-War”. Very similar to the Hundred-Year-War between England and France (1337-1453), the ongoing conflict has been going through its periods of high intensity, lulls and truce. Further tensions and escalation of conflicts by America and its allies are most likely to engulf pre-existing conflict zones in Iraq and Afghanistan and create new battlefields in Iran, Syria, Pakistan and elsewhere within and beyond the Muslim World. America is likely to drag its client states into the war. Conversely, anti-Western countries are likely to forge ties in the coming years as well. It seems, eventually, China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Israel (among others) are not likely to remain neutral after further escalation of the conflicts. We believe the preponderance of the Military-Industrial Complex and lobbies that profit immensely from wars and conflicts in America have been at the roots of most global conflicts. The so-called “global jihad” and threats from “rogue states” like Iran and North Korea are nothing but red herrings. The real threat to American hegemony will not come from Muslim autocracies but newly emerging democracies or quasi-democracies in the Muslim World. The so-called Arab Spring has installed yester years’ Islamist-turned-democrats to power in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. As the *Ennahda* party of Tunisia does not have liberal democratic credentials so does the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt represent illiberal Islamism. America can neither deny these parties their democratic right to run governments, nor can it expect them to promote liberal democracy and secularism.

The so-called Arab Spring heralded a new beginning in the Arab World. America’s and Arab rulers’ ambivalence and duplicities towards the Arab Spring have created problems for the entire Muslim World. While Arab monarchs and America had been selective in supporting the regime change movements in the Arab World, they would love to see Syrian and Iranian regimes go the Mubarak-Qaddafi way. They are against similar changes in Saudi

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (first published in 1835), edited and abridged by Richard D. Heffner, Penguin Books, New York 1984 edition, pp.128-9

Arabia, Bahrain and other monarchies in the Arab World. Iran also has serious reservations about any regime-change movement in Syria. American policymakers possibly know democracy in the Muslim World is not going to benefit America and Arab monarchies. Yet, paradoxically, they favored regime-change movements in Egypt, Libya and Syria.

Conservative Gulf monarchies were unhappy with America's support for regime-change in Egypt. Israel is not pleased at the regime-change in Egypt either, as it knows well that a democratic Egypt in the long-run will not respect the peace treaty with Israel, signed by its dictator, the late Anwar Sadat in 1978. It is noteworthy that the Muslim Brotherhood declared that once elected to power, it would scrap the treaty. In view of the growing popularity of Islamism in Egypt, it is no longer a question if but how soon the Islamists will be eventually calling the shots there. Most importantly, although the Arab Spring has overthrown only a handful of Arab regimes, the wind of change is blowing fast to weaken the already de-legitimized Arab autocracies in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE. They will sustain as long as they have the oil money and American troops to support them. Having 25 per cent youth unemployment, growing population pressure and mass disapproval of America among Arab population, autocratic pro-American Arab regimes do not have good prospects in the coming years. One Brookings Institution opinion poll in October 2011 in five Arab countries –Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and UAE – revealed that more than 70 per cent of Arabs support the Arab Spring and dislike America. Only around 35 per cent of Arabs consider Iran a threat, while the bulk of them consider Turkey their role model.<sup>2</sup>

American State Department has been consistently myopic with regard to its Middle East policy. Far from reflecting American's core values in regards to justice, peace and human rights, American foreign policy has been mostly protecting the interests of America's military, big business and the overpowering Israel Lobby. American-sponsored regime-changes in the Muslim World, which in violation of democracy and/or human rights and sovereignty of nation states in Syria (1949-1955), Iran (1953), Indonesia (1965), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and among others, Libya (2011), have neither benefitted America's long-term interests nor have they stabilized these countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Shibly Telhami, "The 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll", Brookings Institution November 2011, [http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/1121\\_arab\\_public\\_opinion\\_telhami.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/1121_arab_public_opinion_telhami.aspx) (accessed May 10, 2012)

Meanwhile, the so-called Arab Spring has not brought rich dividends to the proponents of democracy in the Arab World. Tunisia seems to be the only beneficiary of the Arab Spring. The Islamist *Ennahda* Party-led coalition government with non-Islamist partners, including the centre-left Congress for the Republic and *Ettakatol*, gained substantial mass support by early 2012. Although the Government will take time to create enough jobs for the nineteen percent unemployed Tunisians, yet it has so far successfully resisted the Salafist demand for the imposition of *Shariah* law in the country. However, several *Ennahda* leaders have been engaged in a “quiet dialogue” with radical Islamist Salafists. One is not sure how long the Tunisian democracy will sustain.<sup>3</sup> Things are not that rosy in Libya and Egypt either. Egypt went through its parliamentary elections in January 2012 electing deputies who mostly belong to “soft” Muslim Brotherhood (47%) and “hardcore” Islamist Salafists (around 23%). However, soon the Egyptian military declared the elections null and void and dissolved the parliament. Meanwhile, Egypt had been thoroughly polarized between Islamists and non-Islamists. Most Egyptians want *Shariah* law and promise to “liberate” Egypt from “subservience to Israel and the West”.<sup>4</sup> Although Egyptians have chosen their leader for the “first time in 5,000 years”<sup>5</sup>, the election of anti-American and anti-Israeli Islamists to power in this resource-poor populous country does not bode well for Western interests and peace in the region.

The regime-change movements on the one hand have weakened the strong hold of Arab autocracies; and on the other, have emboldened people in post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia. Arabs vying for democracy and human rights see Turkey as a role model. No longer considering Iran as an adversary, many Arabs are envious of Iranian men and women who have more freedom and better rights than they enjoy under Arab autocracies. Iran’s persistent criticism of American hegemony and pro-American Israeli and Arab regimes has also been important catalysts in this regard. In view of this, it seems Henry Kissinger was right in registering his skepticism about the success of “revolutions” in the Arab World. He thought the “Arab Spring” was counterproductive and criticized America’s reengaging militarily in countries in the name of “humanitarian intervention”:

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<sup>3</sup> “Tunisia’s Islamists have survived a shaky first 100 days in power”, *The Economist*, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>4</sup> “Egypt’s presidential race: Battle of the beards”, *The Economist*, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2012

<sup>5</sup> Headline in London’s *Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 2012

*The Arab Spring is widely presented as a regional, youth-led revolution on behalf of liberal democratic principles. Yet Libya is not ruled by such forces; it hardly continues as a state. Neither is Egypt, whose electoral majority (possibly permanent) is overwhelmingly Islamist. Nor do democrats seem to predominate in the Syrian opposition. The Arab League consensus on Syria is not shaped by countries previously distinguished by the practice or advocacy of democracy. Rather, it largely reflects the millennium-old conflict between Shiite and Sunni and an attempt to reclaim Sunni dominance from a Shiite minority.... The revolution will have to be judged by its destination, not its origin; its outcome, not its proclamations.<sup>6</sup>*

### **America and the Syrian Regime:**

Thanks to the influence of the Israel Lobby, America has had a problematic relationship with Syria since the 1940s. America first intervened into Syria in March 1949 by toppling the democratically elected President Shukri al-Quwatly who had been elected for a five-year-term in 1943. The CIA-sponsored coup d'état installed Colonel Husni al-Zaim, the "America's Boy" to power. Unlike nationalist Quwatly, who did not toe the American line, al-Zaim was too compliant to fulfill American desire. He legitimized Israel by signing an armistice with it and allowed ARAMCO (Arabian-American Oil Company) to pipe Saudi oil through Syria to the Mediterranean coast. Between 1949 and 1955, America staged five military coups in Syria to complete the de-democratization process in the country. Newly discovered documents reveal a joint Anglo-American ploy to overthrow the anti-Western Syrian regime in 1957. Interestingly, very similar to what America and its allies have been doing since 2011 to overthrow the Assad-regime through the "Free Syrian Army", President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Macmillan wanted a "regime change" in Syria in the name of the "Free Syria Committee". The CIA and SIS (MI6) planned to stage fake border incidents between Syria and its pro-Western neighbors (Turkey and Jordan) as an excuse for an invasion by its neighbors. The plan was not only to topple the pro-Russian regime but also to eliminate some key figures in the Syrian government.<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, with a brief union with Egypt as part of the United Arab Republic (1958-1961), Syria gradually distanced itself from the West and came under the avowedly anti-Western / anti-Israeli Arab Socialist Baath Party

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<sup>6</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, "A new doctrine of intervention?", *Washington Post*, March 30, 2012

<sup>7</sup> Ben Fenton, "Macmillan backed Syria assassination plot: Documents show White House and No 10 conspired over oil-fuelled invasion plan", *The Guardian*, 26 September 2003

rule.<sup>8</sup> America adopted a more hostile policy towards Syria after 9/11, and there were speculations about America-led regime-change in Syria after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Bashar Assad's opposition to the US invasion of Iraq and his harboring Iraqi fugitives and opening Syrian border to encourage armed Syrian / Arab fighters to infiltrate into Iraq to fight Americans angered the Bush administration.

In February 2012, American- and Israeli-armed and Saudi financed Arab League mercenaries infiltrated into Syria in the guise of Free Syrian Army. Interestingly, they were fighting along with al Qaeda fighters against the Assad regime in Syria. Secretary Hillary Clinton later admitted that anti-Assad rebels and al Qaeda had fought together against Syrian army. By March 2012, the American and Arab-League sponsored rebellion backfired. The UN, America and the Arab League agreed to a ceasefire and a negotiated peace in Syria under the mediation of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. However, because of American interest in breaking the Syria-Iran-Hezbollah nexus – and to diminish the growing Iranian influence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Bahrain – a US-backed war against Syria is very much on the cards.<sup>9</sup> As a former director of Mossad (Israeli intelligence agency) has written, the West needs to evict Iran from Syria to “cut off Iran's access to its proxies (Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza)... and Israel and the West must prevent this at all costs”.<sup>10</sup>

An understanding of the Syrian crisis requires an understanding of the “Arab Spring”. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain witnessed mass uprisings for democracy. However, as the Tunisian revolution was different from the Libyan, Egyptian or Yemeni uprisings; so was the Syrian unrest very different from uprisings elsewhere in the Arab World. Unlike the Mubarak regime in Egypt, the Assad regime in Syria is neither at peace with Israel

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas Little, “Cold War and Covert Action: The United States and Syria, 1945-1958”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 44. No.1 Winter 1990; Irfan Ahmad, “How the West de-democratised the Middle East”, Aljazeera, March 30, 2012 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/201232710543250236.html> (accessed April 3, 2012); Nikolas van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and Ba 'th Party*, I.B. Tauris, London 2011, passim

<sup>9</sup> Chris Marsden, “Pentagon Plans US-Backed War Against Syria”, [www.WSWS.org](http://www.WSWS.org) , 10 February 2012 (accessed February 12, 20-12) ; Ben Schreiner, “War: Marching Towards Syria: Eyes Cast on Iran”, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) , March 7, 2012 (accessed March 10, 2012); Finian Cunningham, “Syria: The Western Deception Over Regime Change Unravels: NATO Prepares for All Out War”, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca), March 8, 2012 (accessed March 10, 2012); Michel Chossudovsky, “Syria: NATO's Next ‘Humanitarian’ War?”, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) February 11, 2012 (accessed February 15, 2012)

<sup>10</sup> Efraim Halevy, “Iran's Achilles' Heel”, *New York Times*, February 7, 2012

nor is friendly towards America. Syria also has a mutual defense pact with Iran and allows a Russian base on its territory. The “Israel Lobby” in America is trying to isolate and neutralize Syria, first through UN-sponsored sanctions, and then through open invasion of the country to overthrow Bashar Assad a la Qaddafi. Syria, an adversary of Israel and a close ally of Iran and Hezbollah with 300,000 regular troops and 200,000 reservists, is an impediment to the Israeli design in Iran. Israel seems to believe that the road to Iran goes through Damascus.

America, Israel and Saudi Arabia know it well that Syria must fall before they neutralize Iran. It is interesting that while America has turned a blind eye to Israeli threats to attack Iran to neutralize the latter’s alleged nuclear programme, on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2012 President Obama wrote a letter to the Iranian leadership. In the letter, he spelled out the position of the United States, which Iranian officials read as a sign of American weakness. “The U.S. cannot afford to wage a war against Iran”, they surmised. However, the reality is quite different. “What Washington is doing is exerting psychological pressure on Iran as a means of distancing it from Syria, so that the United States and its cohorts can go for the kill,” observed one analyst.<sup>11</sup> King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia stated in 2011 that “nothing would weaken Iran more than losing Syria”.<sup>12</sup> The so-called “Friends of Syria” that includes America, Turkey and Saudi Arabia decided in Istanbul on 1 April 2012 to arm Syrian rebels. Arab nations pledged \$100 million to pay the rebels.<sup>13</sup> As one analyst elaborates: “Their [the GCC member states’] interest is clearly in bringing down an ally of their arch-enemy Iran and not humanitarian....The stakes are too high to make, and repeat big mistakes with terrible consequences.... More weapons in civilian hands would lead Syria to a mix of Lebanon in the 1970s, Algeria in the 1980s and Iraq since 2003”.<sup>14</sup>

In February 2012 a Saudi TV station broadcast a Salafist religious leader giving his blessing for spilling the blood of foreign observers. Most people do not know that al Qaeda

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<sup>11</sup> Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, “Obama’s Secret Letter to Tehran: Is the War against Iran On Hold? ‘The Road to Tehran Goes through Damascus’ ”, *Global Research*, January 20, 2012

<sup>12</sup> John Hannah, “Responding to Syria: The King’s statement, the President’s hesitation,” *Foreign Policy*, August 9, 2011

<sup>13</sup> Mariano Aguirre, “Syria’s crisis: weapons vs negotiations”, *OpenDemocracy*, 7 April 2012 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/mariano-aguirre/syrias-crisis-weapons-vs-negotiations> (accessed April 8, 2012)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; Finian Cunningham, “Syria – The Western Deception Over Regime Change Unravels: NATO Prepares for All Out War”, [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca), March 8, 2012 (accessed March 15, 2012)

leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a video recording – “Onwards, Lions of Syria” – appealed to Syrians and Muslims in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan to help those who were fighting to topple “the butcher, son of the butcher Bashar bin Hafiz”.<sup>15</sup> One wonders, if the Salafists, al Qaeda, America and its allies have discovered common friends and enemies in Syria. In the case of Libya, the American “Oil Lobby” achieved what they had wanted since long – to control the oil fields in Benghazi – through UN-sponsored sanctions against Libya to justify a full-fledged invasion of the country to topple the not-so-compliant Qaddafi regime. Nevertheless, as our experience tells us, America is not going to let Syria go its way. Not only the overpowering Israel Lobby is determined to overthrow the Assad regime, but to paraphrase Michael Ledeen, “every ten years or so” America also needs to invade “some crappy little country”. However, as the regime-changes in the Arab World have so far strengthened the Islamists, Syria would not be an exception in this regard.

One analyst has succinctly explained the Western design to weaken the “axis of resistance” between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, eventually to attack Iran:

*The strategy was simple, clear, tried and tested. It had been used successfully not only against Libya, but also Kosovo (in 1999), and was rapidly underway in Syria. It was to run as follows: train proxies to launch armed provocations; label the state's response to these provocations as genocide; intimidate the UN Security Council into agreeing that "something must be done"; incinerate the army and any other resistance with fragmentation bombs and Hellfire missiles; and finally install a weak, compliant government to sign off new contracts and alliances drawn up in London, Paris and Washington, whilst the country tore itself apart.<sup>16</sup>*

According to Samir Amin: “The Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of the opportunity to appear as the ‘opposition’. Thus, a coherent plan crystallised under the leadership of imperialism and its allies that sought not to ‘rid the Syrian people of a dictator’, but to destroy the Syrian state, modelled on the United States’ work in Iraq and Libya.” He also believes that: “Contemporary imperialism’s strategy for the region (the ‘greater Middle East’) does not aim at all at establishing some form of ‘democracy’. It aims at destroying the countries and societies through the support of so-called Islamic regimes, which guarantee the continuation of a ‘lumpen development’ (to use the words of my late friend AG Frank), i.e. a process of continuous pauperisation.” He has aptly raised the question about autocratic Saudi

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Star* (Bangladesh), February 12, 2012

<sup>16</sup> Dan Glazebrook, “The West's greatest fear”, *Al-Ahram Weekly On-line*, 3-9 May, 2012 <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2012/1096/op8.htm>

Arabian and Qatari governments' support for democracy in Syria: "Isn't it a curiosity that we see now the emir of Qatar and the king of Saudi Arabia among the most vocal advocates of 'democracy'? What a farce!"<sup>17</sup>

America's sincere efforts to settle the Syrian-Israeli conflict could have enhanced America's position in the Middle East by cleaning up its "tarnished image as a neo-imperialistic crusader power" and stabilized US-Syria relationship.<sup>18</sup> Instead, George W. Bush during 2006 and 2007 exerted pressure on Syria to agree for a "peace talk" with Israel. The Israel Lobby was instrumental in America's adopting a confrontational policy toward Syria, although the country was not a serious military threat to nuclear-armed Israel. Then again, although Syria is not in a position to withstand an Israeli pressure, it can create problems for the latter through Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. However, American belligerence toward Syria is unwarranted and counterproductive. Conversely, America should have remembered that Syria fought against Saddam Hussein along with America in the First Gulf War of 1991. Israeli unwillingness to return the Golan Heights to Syria has complicated the situation. Syria by default has come closer to Iran by distancing from America and Israel. Interestingly, Israel and Syria had some sort of understanding during the Clinton administration, which the Bush administration thwarted after the 9/11 attacks.<sup>19</sup> Since "the road to Tehran goes through Damascus", an analyst has observed: "It appears that Syria has become a crucial fulcrum for the White House [to overthrow the Iranian regime], with the option of overt military intervention, on one side, and a continuation of diplomacy and covert action on the other".<sup>20</sup>

Syria has all the potential to turn itself into another fractured country polarized on sectarian and ideological lines. Since early 2012 America and Arab League sponsored mercenaries (that include al Qaeda terrorists) and Assad loyalists are engaged in a bloody conflict. One may impute the indiscriminate killing of Syrians to government troops, foreign

<sup>17</sup> Samir Amin, "The Arab revolutions: a year after", *Interface*, May 2012

<sup>18</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, "Damascus vs. Washington: Between the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Pax Americana'", in Bruce Cumings, Ervand Abrahamian and Moshe Ma'oz, *Inventing the Axis of Evil: The Truth about North Korea, Iran and Syria*, The New Press, New York 2004, pp.157-8 and 208-9

<sup>19</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2007, Chapter 9 "Taking Aim at Syria", pp.263-79

<sup>20</sup> Evan Taylor, "Militarizing the Conflict in Syria", *Z Magazine*, April 2012, Vol.25, Number 4

fighters and Syrian rebels. However, not only has the regime substantial domestic support and powerful allies in Russia and China, it has also the support from neighbouring Iraq, Jordan, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and last but not least, from Iran, another *bête noir* to the Western-Saudi-Israeli triumvirate. Interestingly, Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki of Iraq, who is very close to the Iranian President, does not want the removal of the Assad regime, and allows Iranian convoys through Iraqi territories into Syria. As Fawaz Gerges reveals, of late the Tehran-Baghdad highway has virtually become the “life-line” for Syria.<sup>21</sup> Thus it appears that the Assad regime is not that vulnerable to Syrian rebels and foreign mercenaries.

Meanwhile, during and after the Houla Massacre in Syria in May-June 2012, which led to hundreds of civilian casualties, we heard contradictory statements as to who had been responsible for the killing. The Syrian government media and its counterpart circulated totally opposite stories about the massacre. We may consider a BBC report a credible account on the killing. The BBC did not find any conclusive evidence to implicate the Assad regime in the killing of civilians at Houla in May 2012. It held the anti-Assad Shabiha militia, known “as armed paramilitary thugs”, responsible “for committing the bulk of the killings at Houla”.<sup>22</sup> In sum, to a large extent, Syria is the battlefield for two proxy wars between the US and Russia and between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The US-Israel lobby is also interested in breaking Syria into pieces. They are using Kurdish separatists and other anti-Assad elements, including al Qaeda and Wahhabis, against the Syrian regime.<sup>23</sup>

It is time that America and its allies understand what Kofi Annan emphatically stated after the failure of the UN-sponsored peace plan in Syria: “Syria is not Libya, it will not implode; it will explode beyond its borders.” Contrary to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon’s stand on Syria – who one analyst believes “frequently reflects Washington’s interests” – Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the CIA have been mainly responsible for the

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<sup>21</sup> Fareed Zakaria GPS Show, CNN June 3, 2012

<sup>22</sup> BBC News Middle East, 31 May 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18274542> (accessed June 22, 2012)

<sup>23</sup> Michel Chossudovsky, “Hidden US-Israeli Military Agenda: ‘Break Syria into Pieces’”, June 16, 2012, *Global Research*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=31454> ; Scott Taylor, “Syria Strategy looks like Bloody Repeat”, June 18, 2012, *Global Research*, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=31476> (accessed June 22, 2012)

Syrian crisis.<sup>24</sup> Judy Bello's criticism of America for what she thinks is "pouring gas on the fire in Syria" – in view of her fact finding report on Syria – seems quite pertinent. She singles out America as "incorrigible in its determination to control the wealth and peoples of the earth". She also blames the US and Israel for their six decade-long intervention in Syria and Palestine, for turning people into refugees and destitute even in their own countries – Palestinians and Kurds, for example – and she has raised the question if Egyptians and Jordanians are better off than Syrians under Assad. She has also raised issues like American, Israeli, Saudi Arabian and Islamist over-enthusiasm about the prospect of overthrowing the Assad regime, through violence or through the UN-sponsored invasion of Syria. She pointed out that Syria under Assad was not a Shiite Alawite minority rule but a joint Shiite-Sunni-Christian-Kurdish rule. The summary of her findings is as follows:

- a) Many of the "facts" presented in media about the situation in Syria are undocumented and the truth is difficult to ascertain; a "continual stream of reports of atrocities in Syria has over time been shown to be untrue or distorted". "The London Observatory, a significant source of information on the Syrian crisis from day 1, has no one on the ground in Syria, and has rather shady credentials";
- b) "However, even a year ago, about 1/3 of the casualties were members of the police and military, though this fact was not reported in western news outlets. Suicide bombings of government buildings have killed scores and injured hundreds in Damascus and Aleppo. The question as to who perpetrated the recent massacres in Hula and Hama remains unanswered. Investigations have not been completed";
- c) "The *Free Syrian Army* is not a single organization, but rather an assortment of militias composed of conscripts who have defected from the Syrian Army, Islamic fighters from within Syria and Islamic fighters from neighboring states along with members of al Qaeda and militiamen from other Middle East wars in Libya, Lebanon and Iraq looking for a new war";
- d) "Muslim Brotherhood fighters have assassinated Christian, Alawite and Druze, and leaders of these communities";
- e) "US Ambassador Robert Ford was meeting with and advising members of the Syrian

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<sup>24</sup> Phyllis Bennis, "Syria: No to intervention, no to illusions". *Mondoweiss*, June 30, 2012 <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/06/syria-no-to-intervention-no-to-illusions.html> (accessed July 3, 2012)

Opposition from the day he set foot on the ground in Syria, which was only shortly before protests began there. The US has been demanding that the Syrian President step down from day one of the protests. The US has been training and arming a military insurgency in Syria that initially took cover behind peaceful protesters, and now has driven them from the streets. The US admits to having CIA agents on the ground in Turkey assisting Syrian militants”.<sup>25</sup>

As Paul Rogers puts it, Syria [very much like post-Cold War Afghanistan] since the open rebellion against Bashar Assad in 2011 has become a battlefield of a long-drawn proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and between the US-Israeli duumvirate and Iran. The old Cold War adversaries, Russia and America have had their interests in Syria as well, both vying for compliant regimes in the country. The upshot has been the Syrian civil war. In view of the presence of hardcore Islamist fighters in the anti-Assad coalition, I think Rogers has aptly explained the Syrian conundrum:

*The implication is that Saudi backing for the Syrian rebels is part of a strategy to replace the Assad regime with Sunni-dominated governance, which might include Salafist elements. The presence of al-Qaida-linked paramilitaries in Syria may help to further the Saudi plan. Iran's efforts to prop up its Syrian ally reinforce the Riyadh-Tehran antagonism, as well as making the US even more determined to curb Iran's influence. Washington's strong support for its Saudi partner casts further doubt on the argument that its encouragement of the Syrian opposition has much to do with democracy.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Judy Bello, “Who is Driving the Syrian Uprising? Hands Off Syria!” *Counterpunch*, June 29-July 01, 2012  
<http://www.counterpunch.org/2012/06/29/hands-off-syria/print> (accessed July 2, 2012)

<sup>26</sup> Paul Rogers, “Syria, the proxy war”. *Open Democracy*, 14th June 2012  
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/paul-rogers/syria-proxy-war> (accessed June 19, 2012)

In June 2013, while the Obama administration favored giving arms to the Syrian rebels, a Pew Poll revealed that around 70 per cent of Americans were against the move. Obama's justification for giving arms to Syrian rebels was Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons against them. Interestingly, as the UN was not convinced of Obama's unsubstantiated claim about Assad using chemical weapons, the Russian President Putin ridiculed the Western idea of arming "those [Syrian rebels] who kill their enemies and eat their organs flouts Europe's humanitarian values".<sup>27</sup> A Free Syrian Army representative claimed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2013 that it had already received a shipment of arms from allies, which he said would soon change the course of the war.<sup>28</sup>

By late August 2013, there was a dramatic turn of events in Syria. On 21<sup>st</sup> August, several hundred Syrian rebels and more than 400 women and children died in a chemical attack in Damascus. Soon America blamed the Assad regime for the illegal use of chemical weapons to kill people, and declared punitive actions against Syria was in the offing for crossing the "red line". President Obama in 2012 declared that any use of chemical weapon by Assad would tantamount to crossing the "redline", which would justify US punitive actions against his regime. Within days the entire US administration said there was "very little doubt" that the Syrian regime had used deadly chemical weapons against civilians.<sup>29</sup> Soon the entire US administration and sections of Western media started vitriolic anti-Assad campaign and favoured bombing Syria, "even if it is illegal", for crossing the "redline". Washington declared that it was going to attack Syria "more briefly but grievously", as punishment for Assad's alleged use of WMD, and that the US had no intention of overthrowing his regime.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Guardian*, June 16, 2013, RT News, 22 June 2013

<sup>28</sup> Al Jazeera English,  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/201362113326945851.html> June 22,  
 2013 (accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2013)

<sup>29</sup> KIMBERLY DOZIER, "Syria Chemical Attack: 'Very Little Doubt' Assad Regime Used Weapons, U.S. Official Says", *Huffington Post*, August 25, 2013  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/25/syria-chemical-attack-us\\_n\\_3812796.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/25/syria-chemical-attack-us_n_3812796.html)  
 (accessed August 28, 2013)

<sup>30</sup> "Obama Weighing 'Limited' Strikes on Syrian Forces", *New York Times*, August 28, 2013; Ian Hurd, "Bomb Syria. Even if It Is Illegal", *New York Times* (op-ed), August 28, 2013; "Syria: A step too far", *Economist*, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013; Michael Weiss, "How to Oust Assad: And Why the United States Should Try", *Foreign Affairs*, August 28, 2013  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139874/michael-weiss/how-to-oust-assad?cid=nlc->

America and its handful of allies refused to give any credence to reports that pointed fingers at Syrian rebels, not at the Assad regime for the gas attack. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a former Saudi ambassador to the US (referred to as “*habib*” or “friend” by pro- al Qaeda rebels in Syria) is said to have been the main provider of arms to Syrian rebels.<sup>31</sup> Months before the controversy about Assad’s alleged use of Sarin gas to kill Syrian rebels in May 2013, Carla del Ponte, a member of the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria told Swiss TV: “Testimony from victims strongly suggests it was the rebels, not the Syrian government, that used Sarin nerve gas during a recent incident in the revolution-wracked nation”.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, the Obama administration did not wait to hear from the UN weapon inspectors (who had inspected the site of gas attack in Damascus) and within days of the gas attack, mobilized its navy and air force to “punish” Assad. Many analysts argue as to why Assad would not use chemical weapon to “invite a Western intervention” into Syria while he was “winning” the war against Syrian rebels.<sup>33</sup>

While it seemed the Obama Administration was adamant to “punish” Assad for his alleged use of chemical weapons, some dramatic development took place on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013. Almost to the surprise of the whole world, Obama accepted a Russian proposal to withhold a military strike on Syria on President Putin’s assurance that Assad would allow international observers to take control of Syria’s chemical weapons. The Assad regime

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this\_week\_on\_foreign\_affairs-082913-how\_to\_oust\_assad\_4-082913&sp\_mid=42434740&sp\_rid=dGFqX2hhc2htaUBob3RtYWlsLmNvbQS2 (accessed August 30,2013); “Hit him hard”, *Economist*, August 31<sup>st</sup> 2013

<sup>31</sup> Dale Gavlak and Yahya Ababneh, “Syrians in Ghouta Claim Saudi-Supplied Rebels Behind Chemical Attack”, *Antiwar.com* <http://original.antiwar.com/Dale-Gavlak/2013/08/30/syrians-in-ghouta-claim-saudi-supplied-rebels-behind-chemical-attack/> , August 31, 2013 (accessed September 1, 2013)

<sup>32</sup> Shaun Waterman, “Syrian rebels used Sarin nerve gas, not Assad’s regime: U.N. official”, *Washington Times*, May 6, 2013 <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/may/6/syrian-rebels-used-sarin-nerve-gas-not-assads-regi/#ixzz2dJ1NugCW> (accessed August 28, 2013)

<sup>33</sup> “Arab League Rejects Attack Against Syria”, *New York Times*, August 28, 2013; Tim Stanley, “Syria: why would Assad invite a Western intervention by using WMDs in a war he was winning?” *Telegraph*, August 27, 2013 <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/timstanley/100232698/syria-why-would-assad-invite-a-western-intervention-by-using-wmds-in-a-war-he-was-winning/> (accessed August 30, 2013); Peter Osborne, “The rush to judgment on Syria is a catastrophic and deadly error”, *Telegraph*, 29 August 2013

seemed to have accepted the proposal; and an armed conflict was averted.<sup>34</sup> Obama's "eleventh hour" decision to not seek Congressional approval for the invasion of Syria (which was least likely to be available) accept Russian President Putin's "peace formula" saved Syria from a possible US air assault and the consequential disaster in Syria and the entire region – at least for the time being. It is worth mentioning that within three days, Assad asserted that unless America stopped arming Syrian rebels and ceased hostility towards his regime, he would not surrender his chemical weapons.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, President Putin, who is said to have "eclipsed Mr. Obama as the world leader" by stopping the latter from launching his cruise missiles to Syrian targets,<sup>36</sup> also rejected the idea that Assad had gassed Syrian rebels, and told America to "stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement".<sup>37</sup> After three days of marathon meetings in Geneva, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed in mid-September on the plan that a) the Syrian government had one week to hand over an inventory of its chemical weapons arsenal to the UN; b) all such weapons would be destroyed by mid-2014; c) if Syria refused to cooperate with the UN, then in accordance with Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, the world body would be entitled to make armed intervention into the country; and d) Syria would also become a party to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which outlaws their production and use. On Syrian compliance to the terms of the agreement, the Obama administration agreed to relent on threat of force on Syria. Then again, US officials made it clear to their Russian counterparts in Geneva that "military strikes against Mr. Assad's chemical weapons infrastructure remained a possibility"; and that "such strikes would be under the auspices of an international coalition, not the U.N."<sup>38</sup>

One may wonder why America is so ambivalent about Syria and other countries in the region. On the one hand, it projects itself as a champion of freedom and democracy; and

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<sup>34</sup> "Obama Embraces Russian Proposal on Syria Weapons", *New York Times*, September 10, 2013

<sup>35</sup> CNN News, September 12, 2013

<sup>36</sup> "As Obama Pauses Action, Putin Takes Center Stage", *New York Times*, September 12, 2013

<sup>37</sup> Vladimir V. Putin, "A Plea for Caution From Russia", *New York Times*, September 12, 2013

<sup>38</sup> Peter Baker and Michael Gordon, "U.S.-Russia Talks on Syria's Arms Make Progress", *New York Times*, September 14, 2013; Jay Solomon and Carol Lee, "U.S. Holds Fire As Syria Talks Move Forward", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 14, 2013; Michael Gordon, "Deal Reached to Destroy Syria's Chemical Arsenal", *New York Times*, September 15, 2013

on the other, it fails to hide its real motive. Knowing it fully well that it has nothing to gain by toppling the Assad regime, and that “a victory by either side would be equally undesirable for the United States”,<sup>39</sup> Washington can ill afford to ignore the long-term geopolitical interests of its regional allies in the region, especially Israel, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Zionist Israel and the autocratic Arab kingdoms have common enemy in Iran. While for Israel, the ideologically committed Islamist regime of Iran is a potential threat to its existence; the oil rich Sunni Arab monarchies fear Iran for two reasons: a) its promotion of militant Shiism and Khomeinism in the Muslim World, which is avowedly anti-Sunni, and anti-monarchical in spirit; and b) Iran’s long-term “pipeline” diplomacy to connect Europe, South Asia and China to sell its oil and natural gas. The Gulf monarchies do not want a pro-Iranian regime in Damascus to allow the Iranian pipeline to go through Syria and Turkey to Europe to sell its oil and LNG. This explains why Qatar, which has the third largest LNG reserve in the world after Iran and Russia, by August 2013 had spent \$3 billion to arm Syrian rebels to overthrow the Assad regime.<sup>40</sup>

Other sources reveal that Britain and the US were planning an intervention into Syria to topple the Assad regime in 2007 long before the anti-Assad movement started in 2011. “Massacres of civilians [in Syria] are being exploited for narrow geopolitical competition to control Mideast oil, gas pipelines”, observes one analyst.<sup>41</sup> In May 2007 the Bush administration authorized CIA operations against Iran, while anti-Syria operation had been in full swing with active cooperation from Saudi Arabia, which had been mobilizing Sunni extremists having links with al Qaeda and exiled Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leaders to weaken the Assad regime. They wanted Assad to become “more conciliatory and open to negotiations” with Israel, and to weaken Iran and Hezbollah.<sup>42</sup> Former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas told French Television on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013 that two years before the

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<sup>39</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, “In Syria, America Loses if Either Side Wins”, Opinion, *New York Times*, August 24, 2013

<sup>40</sup> Michael Snyder, “Is The United States Going To Go To War With Syria Over A Natural Gas Pipeline?” September 3rd, 2013, The Economic Collapse Blog, <http://theeconomiccollapseblog.com/archives/is-the-united-states-going-to-go-to-war-with-syria-over-a-natural-gas-pipeline> (accessed September 13, 2013)

<sup>41</sup> Nafeez Ahmed, “ Syria intervention plan fueled by oil interests, not chemical weapon concern”, *Guardian*, 30 August 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2013/aug/30/syria-chemical-attack-war-intervention-oil-gas-energy-pipelines> (accessed September 12, 2013)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

eruption of the crisis in Syria in 2011, the British Government had prepared for war in Syria to topple the Assad regime to contain growing Iranian influence in the country, and it was “primarily in relation to pipeline geopolitics”.<sup>43</sup> Assad’s refusal to allow Qatar to build an LNG pipeline through Syria to supply gas to Europe through Turkey to the detriment of Russia angered Qatar and its allies.

In the long run, if the Assad regime were to emerge victorious, growing Iranian and Hezbollah influence would pose a direct threat to US allies in the region, Sunni Arab states and Israel. A rebel victory “would also be extremely dangerous for the United States” and its allies in Europe and the Middle East, as some rebels are affiliated with extremist groups like al Qaeda. If rebels win, “they would almost certainly try to form a government hostile to the United States and Israel.”<sup>44</sup>

As secular opponents of the Assad regime fear the preponderance of al Qaeda elements in post-Assad Syria, Islamist rebels think America would come after them after overthrowing the Assad regime.<sup>45</sup> Brzezinski has aptly described America’s over-involvement in the Syrian crisis “inept”. He wonders as to why America is fighting al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere, and supporting it in Syria.<sup>46</sup> Washington seems to have failed to understand that Syria is not another Iraq or Libya. It is home to a Russian naval base in the Mediterranean. So, there is hardly any reason to be perpetually complacent about Russia’s role in the Syrian crisis; it might go beyond vetoing an American proposal to invade Syria at the Security Council in the long run. A popular Russian tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* has warned Washington that: “If optimists in the Pentagon believe that Russia will limit itself to warnings and expressions of anger, like it did over Iraq and Yugoslavia, they may well be mistaken”. Meanwhile Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister felt that “the West is playing with the Islamic world like a monkey with a grenade”.<sup>47</sup> Although a Russo-American

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<sup>43</sup> Roland Dumas: “The British prepared for war in Syria 2 years before the eruption of the crisis in 2011”, June 18, 2013 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeyRwFHR8WY> (accessed September 14, 2013)

<sup>44</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, “In Syria, America Loses if Either Side Wins”, Opinion, *New York Times*, August 24, 2013

<sup>45</sup> David d. Kirkpatrick, “Looming Airstrikes in Syria Test for Egypt’s Leaders and Opposition”; and Michael R. Gordon, “Aim of a U.S. Attack on Syria: Sharpening a Blurred ‘Red Line’”, *New York Times*, August 30, 2013

<sup>46</sup> Fareed Zakaria GPS Show, CNN. September 1, 2013

<sup>47</sup> Steven Rosenberg, “Syria Crisis: Gauging Russia’s Reaction to strike scenario”, BBC News, Moscow, 28 August 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-23865053>

military conflict over Syria is not on the cards, yet Russia's overtly anti-American policy in the Middle East – precipitated by the American intervention in Syria – is likely to further destabilize the region. Moscow is likely to increase weapon supplies to Damascus, forge closer ties with Iran and make an already difficult relationship with America even more strained.

America should pay heed to the following and refrain from intensifying the Syrian crisis just to punish Iran: a) the Red Cross considered the Syrian conflict a civil war between pro- and anti-Assad groups, not a genocide initiated by the Syrian government;<sup>48</sup> and b) a Syria-based anti-Assad opposition group, “Building the Syrian State”, led by Louay Hussein blamed both the Government and opposition for their cynical zero-sum games in Syria: while the Assad regime wanted “either the authority or anarchy” and the opposition demanded “Burn the Country Until Assad Falls”.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, thanks to American and Arab League sponsorship, al Qaeda and militant supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood are likely to go for an Islamist takeover in Syria. An Islamist Syrian regime would be anything but pro-US and friendly to Israel. The departure of Assad – who maintains the balance by restraining / controlling the Hezbollah – would be a headache for Israel. Syrian chemical and biological weapons could also threaten Israel, as Hezbollah's 30/40,000 missiles are capable of carrying chemical weapons to Israel.<sup>50</sup> Al Qaeda operative and Osama bin Laden's Libyan accomplice Abdelhakim Belhadj, who fought against Qaddafi along with pro-US / pro-NATO fighters, has hundreds of Islamist mercenaries in Syria fighting against Assad.<sup>51</sup> Things in neighboring Iraq are far from normal. Terrorist bomb attacks are killing Iraqi civilians and soldiers on a regular basis. Secular

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(accessed September 3, 2013)

<sup>74</sup> “Red Cross classifies Syrian conflict as civil war”, *Foreign Policy* (Morning Brief), July 16, 2012

<https://bay165.mail.live.com/default.aspx?id=64855#n=641914279&fid=1&fav=1&mid=a6708d60-cf43-11e1-9e09-00215ad7e1ca&fv=1> (accessed July 16, 2012)

<sup>49</sup> Louay Hussein, “Saving the Syrian Homeland”, *Monthly Review*, Volume 64, Number 3 (July-August 2012)

<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2012/syria130712.html> (accessed July 17, 2012)

<sup>50</sup> Karl Vick, “Five ways life after Assad could get much, much worse”, *Time*, August 6, 2012

<sup>51</sup> BBC News - Profile: Libyan rebel commander Abdel Hakim Belhadj [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14786753](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14786753) Jul 4, 2012 – BBC News profiles Libyan rebel commander Abdel Hakim Belhadj; Leading Libyan Islamist met Free Syrian Army opposition group ...[www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) Nov 27, 2011 (accessed August 1, 2012)

political parties are giving way to Islamists and pro-Iranian al Maliki government.<sup>52</sup>

The post-Assad Syria is not going to be a stable country. It could become a fractured country of rival sects, religions and ethnic communities, or even worse five different political entities run by five major sects/ethnic groups. “For most of the past 5,000 years, Syria was not a sovereign state”. In the event of Assad’s forced exit, Syria is likely to disintegrate into at least five warring states: Alawites in the mountains by the sea, the Druze in the southern mountains, Maronite Christians in the Mount Lebanon, Kurds in the north, and Sunni majority, 60 percent of the population elsewhere in the country. It can be a replica of post-Saddam Iraq and even worse, a failed state. Alawites constitute twelve percent of the population. The conflict is likely to overflow into Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq among Kurds and others. Syrian Kurds might also strive for autonomy. The spillover effect of the Syrian sectarian conflicts would further destabilize Iraq. Since Hezbollah in Lebanon depends on Syrian support, a Sunni Islamist regime could be lukewarm to hostile to the Shiite militia. One is not sure if the post-Assad Syria could be still friends with Iran and Hezbollah. However, Iran is likely to control Iraq for decades, and through Iraq is likely to keep an eye on Syria and influence Syrians. However, interestingly, after two years of civil war, support for Assad was said to have sharply increased by May 2013; around 70 per cent of Syrians preferred the Assad regime to an Islamist takeover of their country.<sup>53</sup>

Post-Assad Syria under America- and Arab League-backed regime would not be going to be a stable country. Russia and China – along with Iran and Hezbollah – are not going to give up their interests in Syria. They have different interests in Syria. Russia is not going to accept a pro-Western regime in Syria. It has more than 100,000 “advisers” in Syria. As discussed above, Russians would go to any extent to defend its strategic interests in Syria. America’s apparent benefits would back fire as hardcore Islamists would call the shots in Syria, which would go through a violent civil war that could kill as many as four million people out of its twenty million population. Turkey would not gain anything either. Turkey is not likely to intervene further as it depends on Russia, more than eighty per cent of its natural

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<sup>52</sup> “Iraq’s Secular Opposition: The Rise and Decline of Al-Iraqiya”, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP - NEW REPORT, Baghdad/Brussels, 31 July 2012 (accessed August 1, 2012)

<sup>53</sup> “NATO data: Assad winning the war for Syrians’ hearts and minds”, Special to WorldTribune.com 31 May 2013 <http://www.worldtribune.com/author/admin/> (accessed, June 2, 2013)

gas comes from Russia. Israel is likely to be a “major loser”, as any pro-American post-Assad regimes would not have any control over Hezbollah. And Islamists would not be that friendly towards Israel in the long run.<sup>54</sup> As the *Economist* has put it: “Those who wish Syrian well now need to focus not just on how to bring about Mr Assad’s swift fall from power, but also on how to spare the post-Assad Syria from murder and chaos and how to prevent violence from spreading across a combustible region”.<sup>55</sup> America is least likely to pay heed to its analysts who believe that Syria has all the potential to become “another Iraq”, to the detriment of America:

*Washington should stay focused on four key objectives: preventing outside groups from benefiting from the power vacuum; denying weapons to extremists; providing humanitarian aid to those in need; and supporting efforts to build opposition unity. Through material, technical, communications and other nonlethal assistance, the United States should work with allies and neighboring countries to ensure that those who are organizing the courageous internal resistance against the regime and leading the revolution will have a key role in the transition to a new Syria.*<sup>56</sup>

To wrap up the discussion on Syria, I find the following viewpoints very objective and helpful in understanding the Syrian crisis, which is not about the fate of the Assad regime but about the overall security situation that transcends the boundaries of the Middle East. America should pay heed to the following and refrain from intensifying the Syrian crisis just to punish Iran: a) the Red Cross considered the Syrian conflict a civil war between pro- and anti-Assad groups, not a genocide initiated by the Syrian government<sup>57</sup>; and b) a Syria-based anti-Assad opposition group, “Building the Syrian State”, led by Louay Hussein blamed both the Government and opposition for their cynical zero-sum games in Syria: while the Assad

<sup>54</sup> George Friedman, “Consequences of the Fall of the Syrian Regime”, Stratfor, 7/24/12, [http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/consequences-fall-syrian-regime?ut...gweekly&utm\\_content=readmore&elq=f1368d7a587748358f420156494daec7](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/consequences-fall-syrian-regime?ut...gweekly&utm_content=readmore&elq=f1368d7a587748358f420156494daec7) (accessed July 25, 2012); F. William Engdahl, “Putin’s Geopolitical Chess Game with Washington in Syria and Eurasia”, Global Research, July 23, 2012 [www.globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=32019](http://www.globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=32019) (accessed July 25, 2012)

<sup>55</sup> “Towards the end game”, *Economist*, July 21<sup>st</sup> 2012

<sup>56</sup> Katherine Wilkens, “Avoiding the Iraq Experience in Syria”, *National Interest*, August 2, 2012 <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/08/02/avoiding-iraq-experience-in-syria/d5c1> (accessed August 2, 2012)

<sup>30</sup> “Red Cross classifies Syrian conflict as civil war”, *Foreign Policy* (Morning Brief), July 16, 2012 <https://bay165.mail.live.com/default.aspx?id=64855#n=641914279&fid=1&fav=1&mid=a6708d60-cf43-11e1-9e09-00215ad7e1ca&fv=1> (accessed July 16, 2012)

regime wanted “either the authority or anarchy” and the opposition demanded “Burn the Country Until Assad Falls”.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, thanks to American and Arab League sponsorship, al Qaeda and militant supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood are likely to go for an Islamist takeover in Syria. An Islamist Syrian regime would be anything but pro-US and friendly to Israel. The departure of Assad – who maintains the balance by restraining / controlling the Hezbollah – would be a headache for Israel. Syrian chemical and biological weapons could also threaten Israel, as Hezbollah’s 30/40,000 missiles are capable of carrying chemical weapons to Israel.<sup>59</sup> Al Qaeda operative and Osama bin Laden’s Libyan accomplice Abdelhakim Belhadj, who fought against Qaddafi along with pro-US / pro-NATO fighters, has hundreds of Islamist mercenaries in Syria fighting against Assad.<sup>60</sup> Things in neighboring Iraq are far from normal. Terrorist bomb attacks are killing Iraqi civilians and soldiers on a regular basis. Secular political parties are giving way to Islamists and pro-Iranian al Maliki government.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Road to Tehran Goes Through Damascus**

America’s belligerent Syria policy is actually another means to punish Iran, which is America’s and most importantly Israel’s and Arab Gulf states’, especially Saudi Arabia’s and Qatar’s, main adversary in the region. So, it is essential to have an understanding of the America’s “Iran Problem”.

After the failure of the “mass movement” for democracy in the wake of the so-called rigged parliamentary elections in mid-2009 in Iran, America was back to square one. It simply under-estimated the “raw power of nationalism” in Iran, that is, the average Iranian was not

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<sup>58</sup> Louay Hussein, “Saving the Syrian Homeland”, *Monthly Review*, Volume 64, Number 3 (July-August 2012)

<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2012/syria130712.html> (accessed July 17, 2012)

<sup>59</sup> Karl Vick, “ Five ways life after Assad could get much, much worse”, *Time*, August 6, 2012

<sup>60</sup> BBC News - Profile: Libyan rebel commander Abdel Hakim Belhadj [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14786753](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14786753) Jul 4, 2012 – BBC News profiles Libyan rebel commander Abdel Hakim Belhadj; Leading Libyan Islamist met Free Syrian Army opposition group ...[www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) Nov 27, 2011 (accessed August 1, 2012)

<sup>61</sup> “Iraq’s Secular Opposition: The Rise and Decline of Al-Iraqiya”, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP - NEW REPORT, Baghdad/Brussels, 31 July 2012 (accessed August 1, 2012)

willing to accept America as a friend.<sup>62</sup> Since then America has been vigorously projecting Iran as an imminent nuclear threat to Israel and other countries in the region. In March 2012, Obama told Netanyahu to wait and see if “crippling sanctions” against Iran worked. In March 2012, Obama also threatened Iran at an AIPAC meeting in Washington: “Iran's leaders should know that I do not have a policy of containment.... I have a policy to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.... I will not hesitate to use force when it is necessary to defend the United States and its interests”.<sup>63</sup> While Israel had been publicly threatening to bomb Iran’s “nuclear facilities” in early 2012, Obama offered to give Israel advanced weaponry -- including bunker-busting bombs and refueling planes -- in exchange for Israel's agreement not to attack Iran “until 2013, after US elections”.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, Israel is allegedly fabricating a “smoking gun” to justify its attack on Iran; and its spies disguised as Iranian soldiers, have already been working inside Iran.<sup>65</sup> Several incidents of Iranian nuclear scientists being assassinated by unknown assailants for several years may be mentioned in this regard. Iranian and foreign experts are pointing fingers at Israel for these assassinations.<sup>66</sup>

As we know, Western nations – directly or indirectly – controlled Iran up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Although the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company by the Government in 1951 signaled the end of British hegemony in Iran, the short-lived freedom of Iran was over with the CIA-sponsored military coup in 1953 that toppled the elected nationalist government of Prime Minister Mossadegh. Interestingly, Iran’s Shiite clerics under the leadership of Ayatollah Kashani (CIA is said to have bribed the Ayatollah) actively supported the anti- Mossadegh coup. The coup was followed by a period of twenty-five years of tyranny under the Shah, while American and British oil companies owned eighty per cent of the oil revenue. Afterwards Iran was practically an American protectorate up to the

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<sup>62</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “The Wall Isn’t Falling: Historical parallels don’t work in Iran”, *Newsweek*, July 13, 2009

<sup>63</sup> *The Telegraph*, 4 March 2012

<sup>64</sup> *New York Post*, March 8, 2012

<sup>65</sup> Julie Levesque, “Fabricating a ‘Smoking Gun’ to Attack Iran? Israeli Spies Disguised as Iranian Soldiers on Mission Inside Iran”, Global Research, March 27, 2012 [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) (accessed April 15, 2012)

<sup>66</sup> “Target Iran: Assassinations, Cyberattacks, Sabotage – Has the War Against Tehran Already Begun?” *Newsweek* Cover-Story, December 20, 2010: Christopher Dickey et al, “Someone is Killing Iran’s Nuclear Scientists: But A Computer Worm may be the Scariest Threat” and Ronen Bergman, “Killing the Killers: Israeli Hit Teams Have a History of Eliminating Weapons Scientists”

1979 Islamic Revolution. Since then – thanks to Iran’s avowedly anti-American and anti-Israeli stand – we have hardly heard anything positive about the country. George W. Bush in 2002 abruptly named Iran, together with Iraq and North Korea, among his “Axis of Evil”. Iranians least expected this from America while relations between the two countries had remarkably improved in the previous five years. In 1998, President Khatami extended an olive branch to America stressing the need for “dialogue among civilizations”. Former senior policy makers like Brzezinski and Scowcroft also favoured a rapprochement with Iran.<sup>67</sup>

America has been persistently giving a cold shoulder to Iran and is least interested in withdrawing the crippling sanctions against the Islamic Republic. It also did not respond positively to Presidents Rafsanjani’s and Ahmadinejad’s friendly gestures to America in the past. One is not sure if the Obama Administration will reciprocate Iran’s new “liberal” President Hassan Rouhani’s approach towards a “constructive engagement” to normalize the US-Iran relationship. Although it is heartening that Rouhani wants a constructive engagement between Iran and America, one has reasons to be skeptic about any positive breakthrough in the stalemate of US-Iran relationship. The US hawks and the Israel Lobby are least likely to reciprocate Rouhani’s pragmatist approach towards diplomacy. One may quote from President Rouhani’s op-ed to the *Washington Post* in this regard: “In a world where global politics is no longer a zero-sum game, it is — or should be — counterintuitive to pursue one’s interests without considering the interests of others”.<sup>68</sup> What apparently appears to be a precursor to the thaw in the US-Iran relationship after a brief telephone conversation between Obama and Rouhani in September 2013 could well become an episode without any far-reaching consequences.<sup>69</sup> Hardliners in Iran and the US do not favor any rapprochement between their countries. Most importantly, we believe nuclear-armed Israel is not going to be skeptical

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<sup>67</sup> Bruce Cumings, Ervand Abrahamian and Moshe Ma’oz, *Inventing the Axis of Evil: The Truth About North Korea, Iran and Syria*, The New Press, New York 2004, pp. 94-5

<sup>68</sup> Hassan Rouhani, “Why Iran seeks constructive engagement”, op-ed, *Washington Post*, September 19, 2013

<sup>69</sup> Clovis Maksoud, “Obama-Rouhani Phone Call Thaws Relations”, *Al-Monitor*, September 29, 2013 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/rouhani-obama-thaw.html> (accessed October 3, 2013); Saeed Kamali Dehghan, “Obama and Rouhani's telephone call of huge significance, says Iranian deputy: Masoumeh Ebtekar says first presidential phone conversation between US and Iran since 1979 is setback for hardliners”, *Guardian*, 2 October 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/02/obama-rouhani-phone-call-us-iran> (accessed October 3, 2013)

about Iran's nuclear ambition, which the latter insists has no military dimension to it to threaten anybody, including Israel.<sup>70</sup>

As Prime Minister Netanyahu portrayed Rouhani “a wolf in sheepskin” in his UN General Assembly speech on October 1, 2013,<sup>71</sup> one has reasons to remain pessimistic about any thaw in the US-Iran relationship in the near future, as Israeli influence on US administration is too powerful to be thrown away. Rouhani's dismissal of Netanyahu's verbal assault on the former's credibility is interesting. Rouhani thinks “Israel is upset to see that its sword has gone blunt and Iran grows more powerful by the day.” He also thinks Netanyahu's UN speech reflects “Israeli alarm at the signs of rapprochement between Iran and the United States”.<sup>72</sup>

The series of American misadventures in Iran and support for external aggressors like Saddam Hussein, and internal dissidents like the “Marxist-Islamist” *Mujahdeen-e-Khalq* (MeK), failed to overthrow the ayatollahs. Pulitzer Prize winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh has documented evidences of American troops training Iranian terrorist MeK guerrillas in Nevada desert (during 2005 and 2008).<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, America is backing the MeK, which it formally declared as a terrorist group in 1997. Soon after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, MeK fighters stormed the US Embassy in Tehran and took diplomats and staff hostage for 444 days. MeK fighters had fought for Saddam Hussein and were captured by US troops in 2003. In 2004, considering them “protected persons” not POWs, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld decided to release them. In 2007, President Bush set aside part of the \$400 million, allocated for overthrowing the Iranian regime, for the MeK.<sup>74</sup>

In the above backdrop, it is evident that US hawks and neocons are adamant to fight the Islamic regime of Iran, which they portray as a “fundamentalist autocracy” and a

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<sup>70</sup> “Netanyahu Pushes Back on Iran: The Israeli leader has reason to be skeptical, but Iran deserves a chance to prove itself”, Editorial, *New York Times*, October 2, 2013

<sup>71</sup> Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu at UN: 'If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone': PM makes strongest-ever Israeli public threat to attack Iran's nuclear facilities”, *Haaretz*, October 2, 2013 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.550045> (accessed October 3, 2013)

<sup>72</sup> “Iran's President Responds to Netanyahu”, *New York Times*, p.9, October 3, 2013

<sup>73</sup> Seymour Hersh, [http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/10/training\\_terrorists\\_in\\_nevada\\_seymour\\_hersh](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/10/training_terrorists_in_nevada_seymour_hersh) (April 10, 2012) and “Our men in Iran?”, *The New Yorker*, April 6, 2012

<sup>74</sup> Jonathan R. While, *Terrorism & Homeland Security*, Wadsworth, Belmont CA 2012, pp.358-9

“totalitarian one-party state” modeled on fascism and communism. “By 2002-2003, the joke making the rounds in Washington was: ‘Everybody wants to go to Baghdad; real men want to go to Tehran’”.<sup>75</sup> As Samir Amin points out, America and Israel, “under the pretext of its [Iran’s] nuclear development”, would like to destroy the country as it “does constitute an obstacle to the deployment of the US military control over the region. This country must, therefore, be destroyed”.<sup>76</sup> Although it is time that Americans realize Iranians hate America more intensely than they hate the ayatollahs, we notice American analysts and policymakers debating what would be the best time to attack Iran. Rejecting sceptics of military action against Iran, hawkish American analysts and policy makers believe that a military strike to destroy “Iran’s nuclear programme” could only spare the world from a nuclear-armed Iran.<sup>77</sup> Some even consider Obama foolish for not considering “tiny Iran” a serious threat to America.<sup>78</sup>

However, it is least likely that America will attack Iran in the near future. Israeli human rights activist Uri Avnery believes that: “The United States will not attack [Iran]. Not this year, nor in years to come. For a reason far more important than electoral considerations or military limitations. The United States will not attack, because an attack would spell a national disaster for itself and a sweeping disaster for the whole world.” Avnery believes that Israel is also not likely to attack Iran as the latter’s closing down the Strait of Hormuz in the wake of an attack would spell disaster for the entire world.<sup>79</sup> To close the discussion on American and Israeli hawks’ “Iran Obsession”<sup>80</sup>, we may argue that Iran is not a threat to anybody in the region, let alone America or any NATO power in the foreseeable future. We have reasons to believe that Iran has no reason to build nuclear weapons (unless it is forced to do so). We may agree with Robert Fisk that Iran has already “won almost all its recent wars without firing a shot” as America and NATO destroyed “Iran’s nemesis in Iraq” by defeating Saddam Hussein and killing thousands of Sunni militants. Fisk believes that arming Arab

<sup>75</sup> Bruce Cumings, Ervand Abrahamian and Moshe Ma’oz, *Inventing the Axis of Evil: The Truth About North Korea, Iran and Syria*, The New Press, New York 2004, pp. 100-01

<sup>76</sup> Samir Amin, “The Arab revolutions: a year after”, *Interface*, May 2012

<sup>77</sup> Matthew Kroenig, “Time to Attack Iran” Why a Strike Is the Least Bad Option”, *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2012

<sup>78</sup> Carl Rove and Ed Gillespie, “How to Beat Obama: The president is far more vulnerable than he thinks on foreign policy”, *Foreign Policy*, March-April 2012

<sup>79</sup> Uri Avnery, “Israel Will Not Attack Iran” *Outlook*, March 13, 2012 <http://outlookindia.com> (accessed March 31, 2012)

<sup>80</sup> S P Seth, “US’s Iranian obsession”, *Daily Times*, December 14 and 15, 2011

states in the Gulf is counterproductive as armies in these countries “could scarcely operate soup kitchens” let alone fight Iran.<sup>81</sup> Last but not least, unlike Iraq, Iran would not be another cakewalk for America. There are people in the Pentagon who believe that Iran could “spell disaster for the United States and its military” in the Persian Gulf.<sup>82</sup> However, America’s “Iran Obsession” is so intense that some influential American plaintiffs ten years after 9/11 implicated the Iranian government and its top leaders, along with Bin Laden and the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, in the attacks on September 11, 2011.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, in April 2012, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain decided to form a union called the Arabian Gulf Union, in opposition to the Iranian efforts to form a union with Iraq.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, America has been arming conservative Gulf monarchies, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. America’s double standard in missile proliferation in the Gulf is noteworthy. A State Department official said in early 2012 that the US was “working hard to prevent missile proliferation [in the Gulf].” Vijay Prashad has aptly inferred, “such hypocrisy could be disheartening” as it essentially means that “the Good Guys (the monarchs) can have missiles, but the Bad Guys (the Iranians) cannot”.<sup>85</sup> One may agree with Kenneth Waltz that in view of Israel’s nuclear capability, a nuclear-armed Iran would bring stability in the entire region.<sup>86</sup>

One is not sure if US policymakers pay heed to the Russian interests in Iran and the entire South Caucasus region; and what Russia is likely to do in the event of an US-Israeli invasion of Iran. Iran is vital for controlling (what Brzezinski wrote in his 1998 book, *The*

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Fisk, “We’ve been here before – and it suits Israel that we never forget ‘Nuclear Iran’”, *The Independent*, 25 January 2012

<sup>82</sup> Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, “The Geo-Politics of the Strait of Hormuz: Could the U.S. Navy be defeated by Iran in the Persian Gulf?”, *Global Research*, January 8, 2012

<sup>83</sup> United States District Court, Southern District of New York, Case 1:03-cv-09848-GBD Document 294, Filed 12/22/11, Civil Action No. 03 MDL 1570 (GBD), IN RE Terrorist Attacks IN SEPTEMBER 11, 2011, [http://information.iran911case.com/Havlish\\_Findings\\_of\\_Fact\\_and\\_Conclusions\\_of\\_Law\\_Signed\\_12-22-11.pdf](http://information.iran911case.com/Havlish_Findings_of_Fact_and_Conclusions_of_Law_Signed_12-22-11.pdf) (accessed June 22, 2012)

<sup>84</sup> “Bahrain, Saudi Arabia to form ‘Arabian Gulf Union’ next month”, <http://www.yalibnan.com/2012/04/26/bahrain-saudi-arabia-to-form-gulf-arab-union-next-month/> *Ya Libnan*, April 26, 2012 (accessed April 29, 2012)

<sup>85</sup> Vijay Prashad, “Washington bets on the Gulf royals”, [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org) April 26, 2012 (accessed April 28, 2012)

<sup>86</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2012

*Grand Chessboard*) “about three-quarters of the known energy resources in the world”. Russia is least likely to allow any foreign power control Iran and the oil and gas fields in the region. Russian troops and a missile division have already been stationed in and around Iran, including Armenia and the Caspian Sea. Russian aircraft carrier Kuznetsov frequently visits the Syrian port Tartous following the conflict in that country in late 2011. It is noteworthy that in April 2012 General Leonid Ivashov, President of the Academy of Geopolitical Science wrote that “a war against Iran would be a war against Russia” and he also sought closer ties with China and India for stable Iran and Syria. American use of Azarbaijan airfields against Iran could provoke Russia to interfere, signaling a major war in Southern Caucasus and beyond.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, Russia is quite apprehensive of NATO’s missile defence facilities in Eastern Europe. While the then President Medvedev warned the NATO in 2011 that Russia would retaliate militarily if Russia and America could not come to an agreement on the missile defence system, the Russian Chief of Chief of General Staff Nikolai Makarov went even further. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012 he told senior US and NATO officials at an international conference that Russia would not hesitate using “destructive force preemptively” against NATO if the situation worsens further.<sup>88</sup>

As Russia considers both Syria and Iran vital for its strategic interests in the Middle East, any US-NATO and / or Israeli attack on these countries could drag Russia into the conflict zones. Some analysts believe that America “is more seriously preparing for military action against Iran than is widely realized”. After the failure of the third round of talks between Iran and the P5+1 Group (Five UN Security Council Members plus Germany) in June 2012 over Iran’s nuclear programme, America seems to be preparing for an attack on Iran in early 2013. It does not want Israel to do the job as US hawks believe “it is much better that the US ‘does the job properly’ than lets Israel, with its much smaller forces, take the lead”. The Pentagon has already earmarked what types of aircraft, bombs and missiles it should use, and from which bases – Fairford in Gloucestershire, England, and Diego Garcia to

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<sup>87</sup> Clara Weiss, “Russia Prepares For A US-Israeli Military Strike Against Iran”, World Socialist Web Site, [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org) 28 April 2012 (accessed May 1, 2012); Michael Chossudovsky, “The Iran War Theater's "Northern Front": Azerbaijan and the US Sponsored War on Iran”, *Global Research*, April 9, 2007

<sup>88</sup> “Russia's military threatens pre-emptive strike if NATO goes ahead with missile plan”, May 03, 2012, Associated Press, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/05/03/russian-military-ups-ante-on-missile-defense/> (accessed May 10, 2012)

be precise – in the invasion of Iran. The US would like to use B-2s (“Stealth Bombers”) and F-22s, F-15E and F-16 strike aircraft and air-to-surface standoff missiles (JASSMS).<sup>89</sup> However, as Paul Rogers observes, “nothing has been learnt [by America] from the experience of two long and bloody wars, and that is the real cause for worry”.<sup>90</sup>

As discussed earlier, America needs a major war every ten years or so for reasons known to those who understand the dynamics of the American Military-Industrial Complex. We also know that a US retired General Wesley Clark has also re-iterated this by revealing the Pentagon’s confidential list of seven Muslim-majority countries that the US had been planning to invade since September 2001. The list includes Iraq, Syria and Iran. American politicians, media and think tanks have been untiringly demonizing Iran since the Islamic Revolution to justify the invasion. Meanwhile, the US administration wholeheartedly supported Saddam Hussein’s eight-year-long war against Iran (1980-1988) to bleed and weaken both the belligerents for its long-term strategic interests in the entire region. Of late we notice an alarming growth in the anti-Iranian campaigns in prestigious American dailies, magazines and think tank reports (along with the vitriol of politicians). Quoting the Associated Press the *Washington Post* and many other print and electronic media in America in late June and early July 2012 circulated a story about Iran’s alleged terror plan (said to have been unearthed by Kenyan officials who had arrested two Iranian “agents”) to attack the US, Britain, Israel or Saudi Arabian interests in Kenya.<sup>91</sup> We even find the prestigious *Time* magazine and *Foreign Policy* publishing sensational items on Iran’s testing long-range missiles, capable of hitting Israel (with no mention of Israel’s capability to nuke countries in

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Rogers, “America's war on Iran: the plan revealed”, *OpenDemocracy*, 30 June 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net> (accessed July 2, 2012)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Stephen Manual, “Two Iranian agents in Kenya planned attack on US, Israeli targets”, *All Voices*, July 02, 2012, <http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/12508330-two-iranian-agents-in-kenya-planned-attack-against-us-israeli-targets>; “Iranian charged in Kenya with planning an attack says Israeli agents interrogated him”, *Washington Post*, June 27, 2012; “Kenya: Iranians held in bomb plot; target Israeli?”, Associated Press, July 2, 2012 <http://www.sfgate.com/world/article/Kenya-Iranians-held-in-bomb-plot-target-Israeli-3680359.php> (accessed July 3, 2012)

Officials say Iranians in Kenya pled attacks on Israeli, U.S. targets

the region, including Iran).<sup>92</sup> It is least likely that a country like Iran, which is under constant threat of attacks by Israel and/or America for its alleged nuclear program, would sponsor terrorist attacks on America or Israel to provoke retaliatory attacks by them.

## Conclusions

Now, to wrap up, I think American duplicities, arm-twisting diplomacy and overpowering influence of the Military-Industrial Complex have already undermine American values leading us to decades of devastating warfare in almost every continent. Meanwhile, as an Iranian “insider” Hossein Mousavian believes, if attacked by Israel or the US, the already nervous and estranged Iran would definitely go for the nuclear option by withdrawing from the NPT.<sup>93</sup> Now, in view of the growing nuclear buildup in Pakistan and Iran’s potential to become a nuclear power, how the US is likely to react to these developments is anybody’s guess. Since America is fast moving towards “The Golden Age of Special Operations”, drone operations or “wars by remote” on a massive scale by abandoning the “boots-on-the-ground” policy<sup>94</sup>, will be the new way of fighting America’s new wars in the coming years, and mostly in the Muslim World.

It appears that by the 2020s the “unipolar world” having America as the global superpower will nearly disappear. The newly emerging democracies in the Arab World, including Egypt and Iraq; and possibly, an assertively pro-Muslim Turkey with very loose to non-existent ties with NATO and Israel; and possibly a nuclear-armed Iran in league with avowedly anti-American Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the long run will challenge American hegemony in the greater Middle East, South and Central Asia. By then the centres of economic development will further drift from the West to Asia, mainly to China and India. China is most likely to emerge as the main patron of this conglomerate of oil-rich and nuclear-armed nations. On the other hand, in view of the growing Russian

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<sup>92</sup> “Iran tests long-range missile”, *Foreign Policy* Morning Brief, [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com) July 3, 2012 (accessed July 3, 2012)

<sup>93</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “Insider’s Account of Iran’s Nuclear Negotiations”, Video Q&A, May 29, 2012 <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/29/insider-s-account-of-iran-s-nuclear-negotiations/bOFT> (accessed June 6, 2012)

<sup>94</sup> Paul Rogers, “America’s new wars, and militarized diplomacy”, *OpenDemocracy*, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012 <http://www.opendemocracy.net> (accessed June 2, 2012)

influence in the region – as reflected in its veto against any UN-led invasion of Syria in early 2012 (China also vetoed against the proposal) – Russia is also expected to join the anti-American / anti-NATO conglomerate. As losing face or losing global hegemony is least desirable to American hawks and imperialists, they will try to reverse the process through major wars, first against some “manageable foes” like Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and then possibly against Pakistan and others. Rising Saudi defence budget, \$46 billion in 2011,<sup>95</sup> is likely to further polarize the Middle East between pro-Saudi and pro-Iranian forces. American client states in the Arab World are likely to join the fray. Direct confrontation and even a prolonged war between Sunni Gulf states and Iran under Saudi leadership with American support and instigation is another most likely scenario in the coming years.

Meanwhile, America has made total mess of Iraq and Afghanistan, albeit to the advantage of the Military-Industrial Complex who made most of the “trillion-dollar-profit” of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we know, America started messing up with Iraq since the 1950s. Saddam Hussein was in CIA’s payroll up to the early 1960s and later he was in the best of terms with Reagan and Bush Sr. until he was duped into invading Kuwait in 1990 by the US Ambassador. During the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988), America provided intelligence and logistics to Saddam Hussein against Iran. The whole world watched Donald Rumsfeld meeting Saddam Hussein in Baghdad during the War. However, soon after the end of the Iraq-Iran war in a stalemate, America clipped the wing of Saddam Hussein after he had become “menacingly powerful” to the detriment of its allies in the Middle East. American Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie on purpose misled Saddam Hussein, and sort of, gave him the green signal. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 led to the American-led invasion of Iraq, the “Operation Desert Storm”, in early 1991, which Saddam Hussein classified as the “Mother of All Battles”. The US ambassador is said to have told Saddam Hussein, it appears, only to encourage him to invade Kuwait:

*But we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait. I was in the American Embassy in Kuwait during the late 1960s. The instruction we had during this period was that we should express no opinion on this issue and that the issue is not associated with America. James Baker has directed our official spokesmen to emphasize this instruction. We hope you can solve this problem using any suitable methods via Klibi (Chedli Klibi, Secretary General of the Arab*

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<sup>95</sup> *Economist*, April 7<sup>th</sup>2012

*League) or via President Mubarak. All that we hope is that these issues are solved quickly.*<sup>96</sup>

We all know how preposterous was the American argument in favour of the second US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although many Americans still believe that there was an “intelligence failure” on part of the CIA – it misread and thought Saddam Hussein had the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and was building nuclear bombs – from Bush Jr. to Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell and almost every big wig in the US administration deliberately lied to the Americans and the whole world about the so-called WMD. We also know the real motive behind the invasion, giving the most powerful lobbies in America, Britain, Italy, Spain, Australia and other allied powers the opportunity to make billions as “profits” or “dividends” of the war. We also know that directly or indirectly the invaders killed more than a million Iraqis and the country is in total mess. It is, however, an irony that the “liberated” Iraq (and Afghanistan) is very close to Iran, America’s main nemesis in the Middle East. It is only a question of time when Iranian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Afghan, Pakistani, Arab and Central Asian Shiites will come closer to each other to threaten American interests in the Middle East, South and Central Asia.

Finally, one may re-iterate the following positions in the light of the foregoing discussion on the nature and extent of American imperialism; if the Empire is likely to hit again on a massive scale to prolong the ongoing conflicts; and if there is a way out of a devastatingly destabilizing future in the coming decades. We know nothing in particular has all of a sudden gone wrong with Islam, and so many things seem to be going wrong with America (since 1492), we need an understanding of the factors –people, events and ideas – that have turned the richest country into the most hated empire in our times. Thanks to Reagan’s Assistant Treasury Secretary Paul Craig Roberts’s succinct definition of the American Empire, we already know that the Empire “*extracts resources from the American people for the benefit of the few powerful interest groups that rule America. The military-security complex, Wall Street, agri-business and the Israel Lobby use the government to extract resources from Americans to serve their profits and power*”. He also tells us that the empire-builders have modified the US Constitution in the name of national security in such a manner that “Americans’ incomes have been redirected to the pockets of the 1 percent”. Craig Roberts’ appraisal is a good follow up of what President Eisenhower singled out in 1961 as

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<sup>96</sup> *New York Times*, September 23, 1990

the main perpetrator of all modern wars that America participated in after the Second World War, America's Military-Industrial-Congressional Lobby.

It is time American civil societies, veterans and their family members, and common people take pro-active measures to demilitarize the American psyche for the sake of global peace and justice. They should know – as Eisenhower pointed out – American Military Industrial Complex is at the roots of all major wars America has fought since 1945. They should all take General Wesley Clark (ret) seriously, who revealed the US secret plan to invade seven countries, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia and Iran even before it invaded Afghanistan. The plan was revealed to the General ten days after 9/11 by some top brasses at the Pentagon. As General Clark reveals, what is most worrisome is that the US loves to use the hammer (its military) to fix whatever it thinks has gone wrong anywhere in the world. The US loves to invade countries because its military is great “to take down governments”.<sup>97</sup> The American Congress (Eisenhower's “Congressional Lobby”) and policy makers at the State Department (Senator Fulbright's “Voodoo Magicians”) are too powerful and manipulative to be restrained by half-hearted peace initiatives by Americans.

In sum, as the bulk of Americans are so naïve, politically inert and indifferent that they hardly raise any question about their country's foreign policy and invasions of one country after another (America wages a major war almost after every ten years) in the name of freedom and security of America. Again, Americans are too “patriotic” to question the justifications for the wars their country initiates in distant lands, or the ones their leaders are contemplating to wage in the near future. However, of late Washington is seriously thinking of a rapprochement with Iran by withdrawing its crippling sanctions on Tehran, and allowing a peace talk between the Assad regime and Syrian rebels (which is again speculative as one is not sure who would represent the divided Syrian opposition) for a peaceful settlement of the civil war in Syria.<sup>98</sup> It is, however, too early to assume that Washington will be ever able to ignore the overpowering Israeli pressure not to make peace with Islamic Iran and the Assad regime in Syria. The Saudi pressure is also surmounting. It has declined the prestigious non-permanent seat in the Security Council as a mark of protest at Obama administration's gesture

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<sup>97</sup> General Wesley Clark's Interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*, March 2, 2007

<sup>98</sup> Mark Landler, “White House Weighs Easing Sanctions on Iran With Tapered Release of Assets”, and Alan Cowell, “Syrian Official Says Peace Talks Could Be Held in Late November”, *New York Times*, October 18, 2013

of friendship towards Iran, and support for the Islamist Morsi government in Egypt.<sup>99</sup>

The Human Rights Watch in a report has revealed that more people are dying in Syria at the hands of anti-Assad rebels. As of August 2013, rebels killed hundreds of civilians, which the report likened with war crime.<sup>100</sup> Despite taking several attempts to initiate peace talks between the Assad regime and its opponents to end the Syrian crisis, the UN is not sure which rebel groups should take part in the peace process. Meanwhile, secular and Islamist rebels (some backed by al Qaeda) are fighting each other, while the Assad regime is consolidating its hold over the country, and America is monitoring the situation. It seems America right now does not want to attack either Syria or Iran, despite the Israeli and Saudi reticence about this policy.

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<sup>99</sup> Frederic Wehrey, “What to Make of Saudi Hand Wringing”, Bulletin, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 15, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/10/15/what-to-make-of-saudi-hand-wringing/gqey> (accessed October 18, 2013)

<sup>100</sup> Aljazeera America, October 11, 2013, Human Rights Watch accuses Syria rebels of war crimes <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/11/human-rights-watchesyrianrebelgroupsguiltyofwarcrimes.html> (accessed October 15, 2013); Karin Laub, “Syrian Rebels Committed War Crimes, Killed 190 Civilians: Report”, Huffington Post, October 11, 2013 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/11/syrian-rebels-war-crimes-report\\_n\\_4083204.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/11/syrian-rebels-war-crimes-report_n_4083204.html) (accessed October 15, 2013)