# Washington seeks new Syrian puppets in war for regime-change

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Speaking in Zagreb, Croatia on Wednesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that Washington is reorganizing the front representing the so-called "rebels" in Syria. The shakeup, which includes the withdrawal of US support from the Syrian National Council, is evidently part of the preparations for a more direct US intervention once next Tuesday's presidential election is over.

Responding to a question about US policy in Syria, Clinton dismissed efforts by United Nations Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, declaring that the US "cannot and will not wait" for the UN to broker a political solution to the war in Syria. Instead, Washington will unilaterally seek to escalate that war with the aim of effecting regime-change and installing a puppet government aligned with US interests in the Middle East.

Clinton went on to describe US efforts to "groom" a new leadership to serve as a front for Washington's neocolonial project. She allowed that the American government had "facilitated the smuggling-out of a few representatives of the Syrian internal opposition" so that they could appear before representatives of the so-called Friends of Syria, comprised of the US and its allies.

The US Secretary of State treated the Syrian National Council, which only last December she had hailed as the "leading and legitimate representative of Syrians seeking a peaceful democratic transition," with unconcealed contempt. Syria's opposition, she proclaimed, could not consist of people who have "not been inside Syria for 20, 30 or 40 years." Instead, it would have to consist of "those who are on the front lines, fighting and dying today to obtain their freedom."

This public jettisoning of the front group that Clinton had so recently promoted as the salvation of the Syrian people for an as yet unidentified assemblage of new "revolutionaries"—hand-picked by the US State Department—constitutes an admission of the failure of US policy thus far in Syria.

Clearly, Washington had anticipated that its policy of covertly arming and funding armed militia groups in Syria, with the collaboration of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, would have toppled the government of President Bashar al-Assad by now. What has become evident is that large sections of the Syrian population, while hostile to the Assad regime, are even more opposed to and fearful of the so-called rebels, a conglomeration of armed groups that has become ever-more dominated by Islamist jihadist elements, in many cases linked to Al Qaeda, and Sunni sectarian groups.

Clinton's statements were made in preparation for a conference to be convened in Doha, Qatar next week, where the new opposition council is to be formally constituted under the tutelage of Washington and the former US Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford. He has been directly involved in identifying and selecting "revolutionaries" who appear likely to toe the US line.

"We have recommended names and organizations that we believe should be included in any leadership structure," Clinton told the news conference in Zagreb. "We've made it clear that the SNC can no longer be viewed as the visible leader of the opposition. They can be part of a larger opposition, but that opposition must include people from inside Syria and others who have a legitimate voice that needs to be heard."

It is difficult to overstate the cynicism and brazenness of the US Secretary of State's approach. Having previously anointed the SNC as the "legitimate" representative of the Syrian people, she now decrees that they are no longer serviceable as the "visible leader" of the opposition. In other words, a new public

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Syrian face for US imperialist intervention is needed, and Washington has handpicked the individuals who will make it up.

No doubt, this is dictated in part by the identification of the leadership of the SNC with the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and US concerns that within Syria this only strengthens the hostility of those who see the bid to overthrow the Assad government as a sectarian-based war backed by Washington.

While the SNC leaders would still get a piece of the action—perhaps a third of the leadership—under Washington's new arrangement, they would have to cede formal control to the new front, including those with "a legitimate voice that needs to be heard." What Syrian voices are "legitimate" is to be determined by the US State Department, which, no doubt, will want to see a collection of Alawite, Shia, Kurdish and Christian "assets" brought on board.

The SNC itself, however, has rejected the US plan, calling its own conference in Doha in the immediate run-up to the US-sponsored meeting and indicating that it is prepared to fight to preserve its franchise as the "legitimate" opposition backed by the imperialist powers and the Sunni Muslim regimes in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. Where these regimes, which have their own interests in the Syrian civil war, will line up is not altogether clear, and it has been reported that Turkey and Qatar still support the SNC.

There is every possibility that the gathering being organized in Doha will turn into an internecine free-for-all, much like a similar conference convened in Cairo last June, where delegates ended up throwing fists and furniture at each other.

"We also need an opposition that will be on record strongly resisting the efforts by extremists to hijack the Syrian revolution," Clinton told Wednesday's news conference. Again, the question is what kind of opposition "we," meaning Washington and its imperialist allies, need, not what the Syrian people want.

In any case, such a formal disassociation from "extremism" and cosmetic change in the exile leaders posing as a government-in-waiting will hardly shift the sectarian lineup of the ongoing civil war. The CIA, which is orchestrating the funneling of weapons supplied by the Saudi, Turkish and Qatari regimes, has acknowledged that the lion's share of these armaments are going to the Islamist militias.

Washington's aim is to cobble together a group that can provide the basis for a puppet regime in Damascus, much as it did with various Iraqi exiles in advance of the 2003 US war on Iraq. As one unnamed senior administration official told *Foreign Policy*, "We call it a proto-parliament. One could also think of it as a continental congress."

That such a body is being prepared strongly suggests that the Obama administration is preparing a sharp escalation of the US intervention in Syria in the wake of the November 6 election, perhaps including the use of military force to carve out a "safe haven." Such an intervention would be part of a wider campaign in preparation for war with Iran, posing the threat of a regional and even global military conflagration.

The entire sordid maneuver in Doha has underscored the real character of the so-called Syrian "revolution," whose leadership is being directly selected and installed by the US State Department. It further exposes the role of pseudo-left forces, such as the International Socialist Organization in the US, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, which have sought to promote the US-backed war for regime-change as a revolution and legitimize the "human rights" pretext for imperialist intervention.

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