

Arab Daily: British Diplomatic Cable Unveils US Plots to Disintegrate Syria

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A Lebanese newspaper wrote that it has gained access to an email from the British embassy in the US which reveals Washington's 5-paragraph plan to disintegrate Syria.

The Arabic-language [al-Akhbar](#) newspaper wrote on Saturday that the US officials along with their western allies have decided to implement a detailed plan to disintegrate Syria and prolong the war in the country by continued deployment on the Eastern banks of the Euphrates.

In a somewhat familiar but precise English, **Benjamin Norman** – a diplomat in charge of the Middle East at the British Embassy in Washington – reports in a confidential diplomatic telegram of the first meeting of the “Small American Group on Syria” (United States, Great Britain, France, Saudi Arabia and Jordan), held in Washington on January 11, 2018.

In this five-page TD, he reveals the details of the “Western strategy” in Syria: partition of the country, sabotage of Sochi, framing of Turkey and instructions to the UN Special Representative **Staffan de Mistura** who leads the negotiations of Geneva. A Non Paper (8 pages) accompanies this TD in anticipation of the second meeting of the “Small Group”. It was held in Paris on January 23, mainly devoted to the use of chemical weapons and the “instructions” sent by the “Small American Group” to Staffan de Mistura.

Hugh Cleary (Head of the Near and Middle East Department of the Foreign Office), **Jérôme Bonnafont** (Director ANMO / North Africa and Middle East at the Quai d’Orsay), **David Satterfield** (US Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East) and **Jordanian Nawaf Tell** and Saudi **Jamal al-Aqeel** attended the January 11 meeting in Washington. The American opened the meeting, stating that a second meeting would be held in Paris on January 23.

David Satterfield confirmed that President Trump has decided to maintain a large US military presence in Syria, despite the victory over the “Islamic State Organization” (Daesh); the cost of this maintenance being set at \$ 4 billion annually. He said that this US military presence should prevent any resurgence of Daesh but, above all, to prevent the Iranians from what he called as settling permanently and imposing themselves in the search for a political solution”. Thirdly, he insisted that the first meeting of the “Small Group” should also provide “material and political support for Staffan de Mistura to” consolidate the Geneva process “.

All the participants welcomed this development very positively in order to “make substantial progress in Syria during the year 2018” and “respond to the propaganda of a Russian

victory". Then, the participants insisted on the "Russian desire to achieve a political solution" that was to be used to make the "Small Group" objectives "more operational".

The United States noted that they would no longer participate in the Astana meetings, having reduced "their participation to a very low level, to emphasize their commitment to Geneva"; in definitive terms, it was decided to "draw a conceptual line on Astana to return to Geneva". They then felt that so far "Geneva remained a failure, despite the efforts of Staffan de Mistura". They were very cautious about including the ceasefire in the Geneva talks: "the truth is that we just do not have the ability to prevent the regime from nibbling the pockets of the opposition. remaining in Idlib and East of Ghouta".

TD reports great progress "made by the opposition over the last few months," pointing out that "it will still need to be more flexible to ensure that the Regime does not leave Geneva (...) while the Americans do not support the assumption of a transitional government as provided for in UN Security Council Resolution 2254".

The text adds that "it would still be useful for the opposition to stop agitating this assumption all the time ...". It was also agreed that "the opposition had to be more flexible and stop agitating the bogeyman of a transitional government without changing the final goal of partitioning Syria and leaving **Bashar al-Assad**".

The French representative - **Jérôme Bonafont** - posed the problem of a possible participation of Bashar al-Assad in future elections. David Satterfield responded that

"the goal was to create conditions and institutions that would allow elections that Assad could not win."

Satterfield added that "there is no flagrant reason" to prevent Assad from being a candidate. Under these conditions, it was mainly a question of testing Russia's intentions, especially so that it could "get the regime to discuss a new constitution, free elections under the control of the United Nations, and the creation of an environment likely to favor these two processes".

Unrestricted agreement of all members of the "Small Group" meeting to "no longer be satisfied with Lavrov's honeyed words, in order to put Moscow under pressure". For Satterfield, it is about getting the Russians to let Assad go, "through meetings of the Security Council and a broad public communication campaign," believing that the announced re-election of Vladimir Putin positively undermined the Russian position.

One of the conclusions of this first meeting of the "Small Group" is perfectly clear: "to reinvigorate Geneva so that Sochi becomes irrelevant"; France demanding more "transparency on the Russian position". But it is still not to oppose "frontally" in Sochi "with the advantage of gathering a significant share of the Syrian civil society", to bring back the "most positive contributions to Geneva, to renew and relaunch this format of Geneva.

The Saudis warned of a "risk of fragmentation of the different opposition groups and asked for help to maintain the cohesion of the opposition." Satterfield replied that their representatives should "be more involved in finding a political solution rather than enjoy great salaries and long stays in pleasant hotels." France supported this remark by emphasizing "communication". In this regard, the British TD makes the following comment:

“Unfortunately, the Fifth French Republic is not intended to finance this effort,” British representatives recalling “that the communication of the opposition was funded in the first place by ... the United Kingdom “.

David Satterfield then explained that the Turkish opposition to the “Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG)” prevented the Kurds from participating in Geneva. While understanding Ankara’s position, he stressed that “we could not ignore a group that controlled a third of Syria (SIC) and took the largest part in the fight against Daesh “.

He explained that

“Americans were seeking to establish multi-ethnic leadership in northeastern Syria to dilute the hegemony of the YPG.”

On the other hand, it was necessary to impose the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces, mainly Kurdish and under American control) in the process of Geneva.

Comment from the TD author:

“I understand that the United States will appoint **William (Bill) Roebuck**, their former ambassador to Bahrain, as the SDF Special Representative. I will follow, but it is worth remembering - according to the separate discussions we had, for example with Fiona Hill - that relations between the United States and Turkey are already bad and unlikely to improve. As a result, Americans are not in the best position to do - solo - the big job with SDF and Ankara.”

The objective is clearly defined: “to get Staffan de Mistura to accept in Geneva a tripartite structure incorporating the opposition, Assad and the SDF”.

Moreover, the Deputy Secretary of State indicates that a “Non-Paper - Reviving the Syrian Political Track in Geneva - will be communicated to Staffan de Mistura before the meeting of January 23 in Paris,” in order to put the Russians at the foot of the Wall “. This document includes: “a political road map, the elements of a constitutional reform, the UN election supervision structure and guidelines for the establishment of a peaceful environment”.

For their part, the Jordanians called the session “Small Group” of “meeting publique most secret of all time.” And the author of the TD concludes:

“For the moment, we must keep a group consisting only of the United States, Great Britain, France, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The next to be invited should be Egypt and Germany (for whom we have pleaded). Turkey should also join the group, but the discussion with it may be poisoned by the Kurds, which will make it more difficult to neutralize Astana. It is therefore not urgent to integrate these last three countries.”

The concluding comments of this TD speak volumes about the future of Western strategy in Syria. The three key conclusions underscore “a real reaffirmation of US leadership behind the scenes ...”. The second perspective is to “keep the pressure on Russia, even if Russia can not convince Moscow to let go of the regime as we had hoped.” In this regard, “we must continue - what we are already doing - to denounce the horrible humanitarian situation as

well as the Russian complicity in the campaign of bombing civilian targets.” Finally, concludes the author of TD, “the Americans told me how much they appreciated our contribution and our support in recent months as they were finalizing their strategy.”

This does not augur a forthcoming crisis in Syria in a context marked by four major developments of the most worrying.

1) The United States has decided to strengthen and diversify their nuclear posture. The Pentagon has announced that it will develop miniaturized tactical nuclear weapons “to adapt to new international threats”. Iranian **President Hassan Rohani** responded:

“How can anyone speak of world peace and at the same time announce that he is developing new nuclear weapons for his main enemies?”

2) NATO Defense Ministers agreed on 14 and 15 February in Brussels on the outline of a new overhaul of the Atlantic Alliance command structures. This “adaptation – the largest since the end of the Cold War”, according to **Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg**, is proposed by the US military. It aims to make the Alliance more effective in a high-intensity crisis. Clearly, it is “better to deter and respond to new threats from certain states, first and foremost Russia.”

3) In the aftermath of the destruction of an Israeli fighter in Syrian airspace, and while Israeli police demand the indictment of **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** for corruption, Tel-Aviv accuses Iran of establishing itself in Syria and threatens to multiply its military operations. This is not the first time that the Israeli prime minister – who refuses to resign – is using the resurgence of regional tension to consolidate his personal power and his alliance with the extreme right of the country.

4) Finally, Washington’s military support for the Kurds in Syria continues to provoke the Ankara era. The crisis of confidence is consumed and the Turkish-American axis is on the brink of rupture. Second NATO contingent, the Turkish army had to accompany the conservative and anti-Western turn after the failed coup of July 2016. Mission has been given to a general with conservative and Islamist tendencies to restructure the derailed Turkish army by the purges. [Description: [IMG]]

Ultimately, the British TD perfectly reflects the Western strategy in Syria: to sabotage the Sochi peace efforts, to add two new wars to the Syrian crisis: that of the Turks against the Kurds and those of the Israelis against Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah. “The Americans have never admitted their military defeat in Syria and do not want to let go and especially their main strategic objective,” said a senior French diplomat, “that of a dismantling of Syria, the type of one who has been driven to Iraq and Libya. Their desire is to arm the Kurds to control the oil areas of eastern Syria in order to influence the political and economic reconstruction of the country. Peace is not for tomorrow.

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