

Hillary Clinton's "Democracy" for Syria

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US imperialism has a long and sordid record of bloody military interventions and interference in the affairs of other countries for the purpose of securing the interests of Wall Street and corporate America.

Ever since William Howard Taft declared that "our little brown brothers" of the Philippines would need "50 to 100 years of close supervision" to develop functioning self-government, these interventions have been justified with assertions of Washington's unique role in bringing democracy to less fortunate peoples of the world, generally at the point of a gun.

Seldom, however, has this pretense been proclaimed so shamelessly as in the announcement last week by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that Washington had decided to appoint a new leadership for the "Syrian revolution."

Clinton unceremoniously dismissed the former leadership, the Syrian National Council, a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated outfit that Washington had proclaimed little more than a year ago as the "legitimate representative" of the Syrian people. Now she says they are just a bunch of out-of-touch exiles who haven't set foot in Syria for decades.

The problem is, Clinton declared, the SNC is insufficiently representative of the Syrian people. So the US State Department has handpicked a new group of individuals and organizations that is to form the basis of a transitional government. "We have recommended names and organizations that we believe should be included in any leadership structure," Clinton told a press conference in Zagreb, Croatia on October 31.

Here one has a text-book example of democracy "made in the USA," or, more precisely, neocolonialism.

To qualify for inclusion in Washington's handpicked roster of "representative" leaders, one must "be on record strongly resisting the efforts by extremists to hijack the Syrian revolution," Clinton decreed.

The aim is clear. The State Department wants a "respectable" face for the grisly conflict that Washington has fomented in Syria, elevating the pro-US businessman Riad Seif and similar figures as a government in waiting, even as the fighting is being carried out more and more by Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias receiving covert US backing.

When it comes to hijacking dissent, however, no one can compete with Washington. This is precisely what it has done in Syria, just as it did earlier in Libya.

Having seen two of its longest-standing and most trusted stooges in the region—Tunisia's

Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak—toppled by uprisings of the working masses, Washington decided to seize the initiative by using the “Arab Spring” as a cover for promoting regime-change.

First in Libya, it exploited popular protests and a trumped-up claim that the population of Benghazi was in imminent danger of annihilation as the pretext for launching a US-NATO war to topple Muammar Gaddafi. Now, in Syria, it has helped turn similar protests into a vicious sectarian civil war through which it seeks the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad.

In Syria, US imperialism has relied more heavily on proxy forces, including Islamist foreign fighters, which have been aided and armed by US allies in the region, principally Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, with the CIA orchestrating the operation from a newly created station in southern Turkey.

This is by no means the first time that Washington has attempted to install a government of its own choosing in Damascus, in contempt of the aspirations and rights of the Syrian people. For nearly a decade, from 1949 to 1958, the CIA waged a non-stop campaign to instigate, finance and support right-wing coup plots aimed at bringing to power a regime subordinate to US interests.

Beginning in 1948, CIA operatives plotted with Syrian Army Chief of Staff Col. Husni Zaim, described by the agency in declassified documents as a “‘Banana Republic’ dictator type,” to bring to power an anti-communist military dictatorship.

On March 30, 1949, Zaim carried out his coup and proceeded to enact Washington's agenda, rounding up left-wing and nationalist forces, signing an armistice with Israel, and approving a pipeline deal with the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO).

Barely nine months later, however, Zaim was himself ousted in another coup. In the early 1950s, this process was repeated, with a more nationalist government being overthrown by a US-backed right-wing officer, only to see a countercoup topple Washington's man.

Then followed Operation Straggle and Operation Wappen, with the CIA collaborating with Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) in assassinations and coup plots involving right-wing officers and politicians as well as Islamist forces. By 1957, the US nearly provoked World War Three over Syria, sending the Sixth Fleet to its shores, deploying warplanes in Turkey, convincing the Turkish government to mass 50,000 troops on Syria's border, and placing the Strategic Air Command on high alert.

During this period, President Eisenhower justified US intervention by describing Syria as a country “ripe to be plucked at any time,” while accusing Moscow of attempting to do the same thing as Washington.

Once again, Washington views Syria as a country “ripe to be plucked” and has unleashed a bloodbath against the Syrian people to that end. Its aims have nothing to do with “democracy” or “human rights,” but are bound up, just as they were more than half a century ago, with asserting US hegemony in the energy-rich and geo-strategically vital region of the Middle East and advancing the interests of America's financial and corporate oligarchy. Once again, this intervention carries with it the threat of a far wider war.

One thing that distinguishes the present US intervention in Syria from those carried out in the 1950s is the support it has received from a whole layer of pseudo-left organizations,

from the International Socialist Organization in the US, to the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, to the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. Their unique contribution has been to cast the sectarian civil war as a “revolution” and portray imperialist intervention as a justifiable means of advancing human progress.

Hillary Clinton’s brazen statements and Washington’s cobbling together of a new leadership for this “revolution” at a luxury hotel in Doha have served to expose the real role of these organizations, which have integrated themselves directly into the operations of US imperialism, serving as willing stooges of the State Department.

The reality is that the working people of Syria and the entire Middle East can advance their interests only through a relentless struggle against imperialism, which is intervening through Hillary Clinton’s Doha “revolutionaries” and the Islamist gangs armed by Washington and its allies.

Settling accounts with the Assad regime in Syria, just as with the US-backed dictatorships and monarchies in the region, is the task of the working class, which must be mobilized and united across all religious and ethnic lines on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program.

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