

What Does Pompeo's Rise Mean for the Middle East?

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Replacement of Rex Tillerson with Mike Pompeo in the US government doesn't simply mean a simple replacement of one secretary of state with another; it illustrates, in significant ways, a subtle yet certain change in the US policy with regard to the geopolitics of the Middle East, where the US is not just having to face a crisis of 'terrorism', but the emergence of a new coalition of states (Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iran) which has the capacity to drive the US out of the region.

Bringing the US back in the Syrian game isn't the only objective Pompeo might be working on as the new secretary; there is a lot that will happen, including in Syria, Iran and the larger geopolitics of the region.

If the past is any guide to the future, Pompeo is one who had voted against the Iran nuke deal back in 2015, calling it

“an unconscionable arrangement that increases the risk to Kansans and all Americans. The Iranian regime is intent on the destruction of our country. Why the President does not understand is unfathomable.”

Now, the US president Trump has promised to walk out of the Iran deal by May if European allies fail to “fix” it. Therefore, while Tillerson believed that the US must not scrap the deal, Pompeo would not hesitate to support the president in withdrawing from the deal and leaving it for the rest to manage it and allowing the United States a major lee-way to keep poking. In fact, just after Trump had won election, Pompeo tweeted that he looked forward to “rolling back” the nuclear deal, which he called “disastrous”, thus forecasting that the very first casualty of his appointment might possibly be the hard-earned Iran deal

Therefore, were the US to withdraw from the deal, it might allow the hardliners in Iran to stage a comeback to power and push for nuclearization—something that might also give the Saudis an excuse to advance their own nuclear programme. It might also excite the Israelis into launching a direct air strike on Iranian nuclear facilities and thus open the gates for a much bigger and a lot more devastating war in the Middle East than we have so far seen.

There is hardly any doubt that one of the cardinal objectives now of the US policy in Syria is to drive the Iranians out of the country as a means to roll back the influence Iran has gained through its success in not only battling out the Islamic State but also in defeating the US war of 'regime change' on Syria. Pompeo appears to be the right choice for the US president to

deliver yet another of his election campaign promises and thus make America 'great again.'

But rolling Iran back out of Syria requires, first and foremost, a change of regime in Syria. Pompeo, as can be expected, does want this to happen—and his firmest statement on Syria came in an interview at the Aspen Institute back in January 2017, when he said,

“It is difficult to imagine a stable Syria that still has Assad in power.”

He added that it is “unlikely” that American interests will be “well served” if the Syrian president remains in power.

That explains why we shall see a surge in the US' direct and indirect military activity in Syria, where not only is Assad strong and regaining control on the lost territory, but where Turkey, too, has started to cause the US a lot of damage by hitting the US backed militias, demanding, what Pompeo would call, a stronger response than has been the case.

Therefore, what comes after Tillerson's departure is not only a heightened crisis and danger of direct confrontation, but also new wars as well. And, it isn't just Pompeo who would help the Trump administration do that. There are others coming as well.

The US president is surrounding himself with people, who are known hawks, and who, the President of the US seems to think, would help him 'make American great again.' The next on the list of replacements is possibly the current National Security Adviser, H.R. McMaster. According to the Western media's own reports, the former UN Ambassador John Bolton, who is an established hawk on foreign policy and still thinks that Iraq war was a good idea, has been visiting the White House as of lately, giving his “job interview.” And, according to the Republicans,

“he is an increasingly likely candidate to replace McMaster, whose long-winded lectures Trump has grumbled about.”

Bolton's known anti-Russia, anti-Iran and anti-Syrian views make him the worst option for this position in the Trump administration. To him, meeting with Russian leadership is nothing short of watching a person lie in your face.

Therefore, possible induction of John Bolton, following the (yet to be ratified) induction of Mike Pompeo in the White House does mean that the US policy is shifting to a confrontation mode vis-à-vis its chief rivals in the Middle East. What the Russians, the Iranians, the Syrians and even the Turks should, therefore, expect is not a simple negotiated way out of the war in Syria; it is just the exact opposite of it that is most likely to happen.

With the US making these changes, it seems that they are not averse to turning the already highly precarious situation to the worst possible scenario.

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Michel Chossudovsky

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