

Is Southwest Asia Preparing for Obama's or Netanyahu's 'Change'?

by Hussein Askary

March 20—Since Barack Obama was inaugurated as President of the United States, his administration has made serious diplomatic moves in the direction of a drastic change in U.S. policy toward Southwest Asia. Some of the most dramatic changes from the Bush-Cheney nightmare policies are the rapprochement with Syria, and the openings towards Iran, two nations that are key for any real settlement in Southwest Asia. Both have been alienated by U.S.-British policies over the past eight years, policies which placed them in the imaginary “Axis of Evil.” The Cheney-directed policy of creating a Shia-Sunni sectarian war throughout the region, with Iran and Saudi Arabia as the two cocks in the fighting pit, could also be on the way to being phased out by the new situation—if words are put into actions.

The statements made by Syria's President Bashar al-Assad in an interview with the Italian daily *La Repubblica* published on March 17, sums up, in a clear-cut manner, many of the expectations from the new U.S. policy. The U.S. State Department has opened a number of contacts with Damascus since Obama took office. But Assad's comments also reflect a deep concern about the dangers that lie ahead.

“The first signs are encouraging,” said Assad about President Obama's moves, and explained: “By disengaging from Iraq, closing Guantanamo, and by his interest in peace, he is keeping his word. But whether we are at a historical threshold, it is too early to say. Still, one thing is clear: After the dark years of the Bush Administration, there is new hope. Regarding Iran, I am ready in principle to help in a dialogue. With Israel, we had come very close to a deal.” In this latter case Assad was referencing the Turkey-brokered peace deal, which was destroyed by the Israeli government's invading of Gaza in December 2008.

He later added, pointing at the U.S. capabilities and responsibilities in the region: “America is indispens-

able in its role as a guarantor, as it is a superpower. In addition, Washington can influence Israel more than anyone else. America will still enjoy a leading role in the region, at least until the year 2030.”

Expressing his concern over the election of Israeli extremist and Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu, Assad said:

“I don't see peace around the corner in the next few years. The idea of a Netanyahu government is not worrying, as much as the shift to the right by the Israeli society, mirrored by the vote for Netanyahu. That is the major obstacle to peace. Yet, we had already come very close to a deal.”

Asked by *La Repubblica* about the Arab Peace Plan of 2002, Assad stated: “That will be discussed by the Arab League Summit at the end of this month in Doha. The peace plan will probably be deactivated, like when you turn off the light with a switch, until there emerges a true partner on the Israeli side.”

Obama: Sudan Is a Priority

Working intensively on a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, engaging Iran in stabilizing the region around Afghanistan, and stopping the drug traffic from Afghanistan, are among the strong recommendations made by Lyndon LaRouche to the new Obama Administration. One more area, where LaRouche has made sharp recommendations to the U.S. President and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, is in the case of Sudan and the Anglo-Dutch-driven operation by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to indict and arrest President Omar al-Bashir.

The President and Secretary of State of the U.S., which is not a member-party in the ICC, have refrained from taking a clear position on the ICC's arrest warrant, and focused rather on the humanitarian situation in Darfur. It is only the influence of such anglophile liberal imperialists such as U.S. Ambassador to the United

Nations Susan Rice which could become a real obstacle for a totally new policy for Africa. President Obama himself, as part of his family's direct experience in Kenya, knows what evil the British and other colonial systems represent, and should not listen to such advice coming from Rice and company.

On March 18, President Obama appointed Gen. Scott Gration (ret.) as special envoy for Sudan. "Sudan is a priority for this Administration, particularly at a time when it cries out for peace and for justice. The worsening humanitarian crisis there makes our task all the more urgent," Obama said in the statement of appointment. Gration, a former Air Force pilot, reportedly has a close personal relationship with Obama. The peace process in Sudan has been a focus as well of earlier U.S. envoys to Sudan. This continues today, as the Sudan government and Darfur rebels have started serious negotiations for settling the crisis in that region. This is a different proposition from the "regime change," and arrest of the President of a sovereign nation-state being peddled by the neo-imperialist forces in both Europe and the U.S.A. The African Union nations, with whom Obama wants to open a new chapter in relations, and the Arab nations are totally opposed to the ICC decision, and are calling on the UN Security council to defer the decision to allow the peace process in Sudan to proceed without interruption.

Arab States Realign

The issue of Sudan, the ICC, and the peace process in Darfur will be among the main items on the agenda of the coming Arab Summit at the end of March in the capital of Qatar, Doha. In the meantime, Arab leaders, in their usual manner, are hugging and kissing each other in reconciliation, after months of quarrels and dissent. The crisis among the Arab leaders was most acute during the Israeli invasion of Gaza in December-January, when Arab nations were split between sympathizers of Hamas (mainly Syria and Qatar, who were also



Ammar Abd Rabbo/ABACA

President Bashar al-Assad of Syria told an Italian daily, "The first signs [from the Obama Administration] are encouraging." But, with the right-wing extremist Netanyahu taking the helm in Israel, "I don't see peace around the corner," he added.

regarded as pro-Iranian), and those who blamed Hamas for the whole crisis, and demanded that Hamas concede power to Fatah and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. These countries were spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. As President Obama settled in the White House, and the Israeli people voted for the fanatic warhawk Netanyahu and other right-wing extremists, Arab nations repositioned themselves to adapt to the new realities. This meant a realignment of the Arab states once again.

A mini-summit was held in the Saudi capital Riyadh, in mid-March, bringing together the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and Kuwait, as a sign of reconciliation. President Assad had not visited Saudi Arabia since 2007; relations between them deteriorated when the Saudis became the main sponsors of the anti-Syrian Lebanese forces, such as the government party of Saad al-Hariri, son of Rafik al-Hariri, who was assassinated

in February 2005.

The blame was put on Syria by Hariri and his supporters in France, Britain, and the United States. The Saudi faction associated with Prince Bandar bin Sultan of the infamous Al-Yamamah-BAE Anglo-Saudi operation, was also undermining the position of pro-Syrian Lebanese groups such as Hezbollah, by supporting Wahhabi/Salafi terror groups fighting both the Lebanese Army and Syria, across the border from Lebanon. Saudi King Abdullah is known to be of a different inclination than that of Prince Bandar. He is more for Arab unity and solidarity, and has a strong relationship to Syria and al-Assad family.

One additional impact of the Arab reconciliation drive is the incorporation of Iran in the general process, instead of it being a rival to the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. On March 14, King Abdullah received the Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki, who was carrying a message from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Following the meeting, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal said that

Saudi Arabia welcomes Iran's effort to support Arab causes such as the Palestinian one, but that this should be done together, and within the Arab efforts in that direction, not as a competitor.

Mottaki, for his part, said that Iran supports the Arab countries' effort to achieve unity among the different Palestinian factions, especially the talks being held between Hamas and Fatah in the Egyptian capital Cairo. Mottaki, who made a tour to all the Arab Gulf states to reassure them of Iran's intentions, said that normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia will start with economic exchange, when the economic ministers of the two countries meet next month. If this type of diplomatic effort is allowed to continue without interruption, and with the help of the Obama Administration's openness to Iran, then the long nightmare of the anti-Westphalian Bush-Blair era would be over.

Get the Brits Out of There

In such an atmosphere, where the United States is opening direct talks with the other parties, it would be entirely legitimate to rid the entire region of the British influence. The British, who always position themselves on both sides of a conflict, would not find a place at the negotiations table. They should not be allowed anywhere near such a dialogue. Their services would not be necessary there.

Just take a look at the massive provocation British Prime Minister Gordon Brown made on March 17, in attempting to set a fire between Iran and the United States. This is typical of the British method, which was used earlier by Tony Blair, in 2007, to push Iran to break all types of collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the West on Iran's nuclear program. Blair made an offer to Iran which he well knew would be rejected, and would push Iran into an aggressive posture, when he "offered" Iran technical help in return for stopping its nuclear fuel enrichment program.

Gordon Brown did the same this time, in anticipation of the Obama Administration's opening towards Iran. Brown gave a speech to the Lancaster House in London, where his threats against Iran sounded precisely like Blair's 2002 threats against Iraq, noted Lyndon LaRouche. Brown denounced Iran's nuclear program as unacceptable, and accused Iran of many crimes against the IAEA. An *EIR* source in the Arab

world noted that Brown had thrown an incendiary statement towards Iran that was designed to sabotage what the U.S.—post-Bush and Cheney—is doing, and will also be a big boost to Iran's Ahmadinejad in the coming election, where the Iranian hardliners will use every attack on Iran as a way to heighten tensions.

The Israeli Dilemma

The other side of the danger to the security and stability of the region, and the world, is what LaRouche calls the Sykes-Picot mentality, especially among the Israeli leadership and the so-called Israel lobby, which are fixated on the idea of Greater Israel, and removing every effort to create a peaceful coexistence between Israel and the Arab nations, especially, a future Palestinian nation living side by side with Israel.

The disgusting propaganda campaign that resulted in the forced resignation of Amb. Chas Freeman, from his designated post as head of the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC), is typical of this mentality. The onslaught was led by an indicted Israeli spy, Steve Rosen, a "former" top official of the right-wing Israeli lobby group AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee). Other parties in this assault on the peace process included Australian press baron Rupert Murdoch, who lent the pages and editorial columns of his *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Post*, and Fox News, to conduct an unrelenting smear campaign against the appointment of the former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, China scholar, and Clinton Defense Department official. This is the type of operation that can delay, and eventually kill, any serious effort for peace in the region.

The Syrian President's warning that he does not see "peace around the corner" is justified to a certain extent, if we look at the prospects of an Israeli Netanyahu/Lieberman extreme right-wing government. Israeli threats to bomb Iran still abound, and a Prime Minister Netanyahu might actually implement these threats.

Only a forceful intervention by the United States in Israel can thwart such a threat. Forces of the Sykes-Picot in Israel, and the Anglo-Saudi/BAE terrorist potential, have to be exposed and stopped as rapidly as possible. That's what it will take to end the legacy of the British Empire in the region, once and for all. The first signs are encouraging, but no one should rest on their laurels for the moment, not the least President Obama and the Arab leaders.