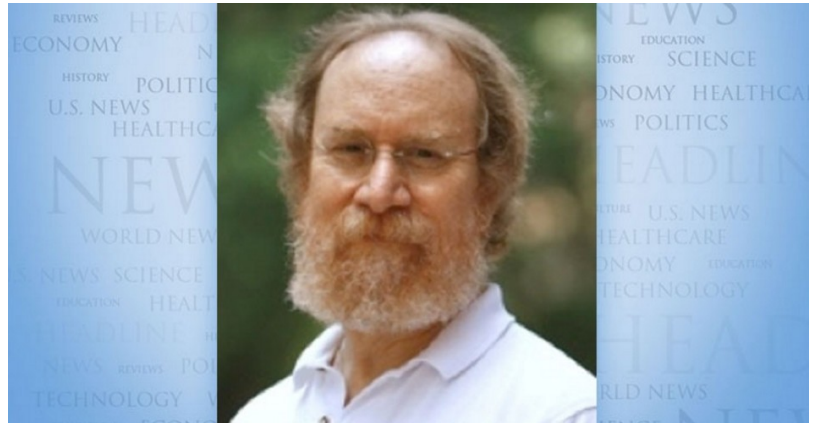




Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on June 1, 2012

U.S. Should Steer Clear of Syria

We should be grateful that the Obama administration seems disinclined to intervene militarily in Syria. But let's note that the administration has not kept hands off. In a variety of ways, it is already aiding the rebels. Moreover, White House spokesman Jay Carney says that all options — even military intervention — are on the table.



Americans should feel uneasy as long as that ominous table remains in the White House.

Naturally, presumptive Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney never appears hesitant about going to war. He calls for “more assertive measures to end the Assad regime” in Syria. But he and his foreign-policy advisers, George W. Bush neoconservative retreads, have no idea what ending the al-Assad regime would mean. Let's recall that Romney's team includes some of the same people who thought Iraq would be a “cakewalk,” with the Iraqis throwing rose petals at the invading American forces. It didn't quite work out that way. More Americans died in Iraq than died on 9/11, which, by the way, Iraq had nothing to do with. (Over a million Iraqis died, directly and indirectly, because of the war, and millions remain refugees.)

For now at least, the White House, through Carney, has it right:

The concern is that further militarization of the situation in Syria could lead to greater chaos, could make it harder to achieve the political transition that the Syrian people deserve. The nature and shape of and membership of the opposition are still something that we and our partners are assessing....

This is not to say that the rule of Bashar al-Assad is a matter of indifference to decent people. Far from it. He's a brutal dictator from a minority sect. But no one can know what would follow his overthrow, especially one engineered by the U.S. government. Just to indicate how murky things are, al-Qaeda and Hamas — two groups the U.S. government is hardly fond of — support the rebels. Rebellions make for



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strange bedfellows. If the Taliban were to announce its opposition to al-Assad, the irony would be complete.

Iran, on the other hand, is al-Assad's ally, which probably explains in large measure why the U.S. government wants al-Assad gone. Knocking him out would presumably deal a blow to Iran, and both the Obama administration and the Romney camp would like nothing more. That's how deep the animosity toward Iran runs.

One can't understand the U.S. anti-Assad stance apart from the Iranian context. The so-called talks between the Islamic Republic and the U.S. government plus five other countries over Iran's nuclear enrichment are showing all the signs of a sham. Keep in mind that U.S. and Israeli intelligence say Iran is not building a nuclear weapon, and has not even decided to do so. In fact, its leader has issued a fatwa against nuclear arms.

The Obama administration, pressured by Congress, which is in turn pressured by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, has imposed harsh trade sanctions on the Iranian people. This economic warfare is undoubtedly taking its toll on children, the elderly, pregnant women, and the infirm.

So, what are the talks aimed at? They are little more than a show in which the Obama administration insists that Iran stop doing what any signer of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has the recognized prerogative to do: enrich uranium for medical and energy purposes. Iran complies with the NPT and submits to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. But that's not good enough for President Obama or Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel has over 200 nuclear warheads, is not a signer of the NPT, and never submits to inspections. Moreover, any other country that acquired a nuclear arsenal the way Israel did would have been condemned by the United States.

The U.S. government — and most of the news media — take as an unquestionable article of faith that virtually anything that happens in the world is America's business. Over the years, that position has brought untold death and destruction to the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. It's time America gave up its imperial pretensions.

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