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AUB panel: US will not oust Syrian President due to geopolitical shift

Beirut, Lebanon- 01/10/2013 - US president Barack Obama will not seek to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, or his regime for that matter, due to the shift in the world geopolitical landscape, said an American studies expert during a panel held at the American University of Beirut.

“The US has shifted its focus from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to the East, especially towards the countries surrounding China,” said Alex Lubin, director of director of the Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR), during a panel organized by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI).

“The fact is the US is on its way to becoming oil independent in the near future and it is much more preoccupied with China, which will soon surpass it as the world’s biggest economy.”

According to Lubin, the US will stop importing oil from the Middle East after 2018 and will rely on Canada to supply its energy needs, and in another 10 years would become totally independent from foreign needs. Additionally, the United States’ internal economic and political turmoil has shifted its attention elsewhere despite the fact that it still remains a global hegemony.

“Since 2001, the Afghan, and later Iraqi, conflicts have been costing US taxpayer \$11 million each and every hour up to date,” emphasized Lubin. “The US public has become sour, and for the past two generations, it no longer holds true that the new US generation will do better than its predecessor.”

“The Russian diplomatic proposal regarding Syria is a sign of weakness,” said Paul du Quenoy, associate professor at the AUB Department of History and Archeology and an expert on Russian modern history.

Du Quenoy considered that despite a show of force in 2008 by Russian President Vladimir Putin during the military parade in Red Square, and the projected establishment of naval bases in Libya, Yemen and Syria, Russia has lost much of its influence due to the Arab uprisings which have threatened its plan to establish the bases in Libya and Yemen, as well as its lucrative arms deals to those states and other regional clients.

“Tartus in Syria remains the only overseas Russian naval base and Assad will continue to fight with Russian support,” he added. “They are scared that the rebellion will spread once again to Chechnya.”

“The West doesn’t like the UN Security Council to use its veto powers unless it is used by them,” said Anthony Billingsley, senior lecturer on Middle East and International Relations at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia and an IFI-affiliated scholar. “The US doesn’t like diplomacy unless it is in its favor, with the US military having a pronounced penchant for the use of force and love of violence.”

Billingsley characterized diplomacy and international relations as “messy,” noting that the law sometimes works and sometimes doesn’t. Also that law, both local and international, mostly rests on consent and much less on police enforcement.

Billingsley also considered that sanctions, under UN Chapter 7 laws, constitute a far harsher measure on a country and its population, like the case of Iraq where more people perished due to the imposed sanctions than when the actual invasion and fighting started.

“The motivation of the major players in the conflict (US, Russia, Iran and Syria) are very complicated and not pure as snow,” he said. “The fact that they have agreed to sit down and talk constitutes an important development.”

“President Obama has recognized that the US had forcefully changed regimes in the past and has spoken with respect of Islamic Law in the example of the Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei’s fatwa against nuclear weapons,” added Lubin. “It is a historic development in US-Iranian relations as there have been no US presidents or secretaries of state who have met with their Iranian counterparts since the Iranian Revolution.”

“An important fact remains that, according to the UN Charter, should the UN Security Council be unable to act, then the UN General Assembly can move in and take the necessary actions like in the Case of the Suez and Congo conflicts,” concluded Billingsley.

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Note to Editors

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