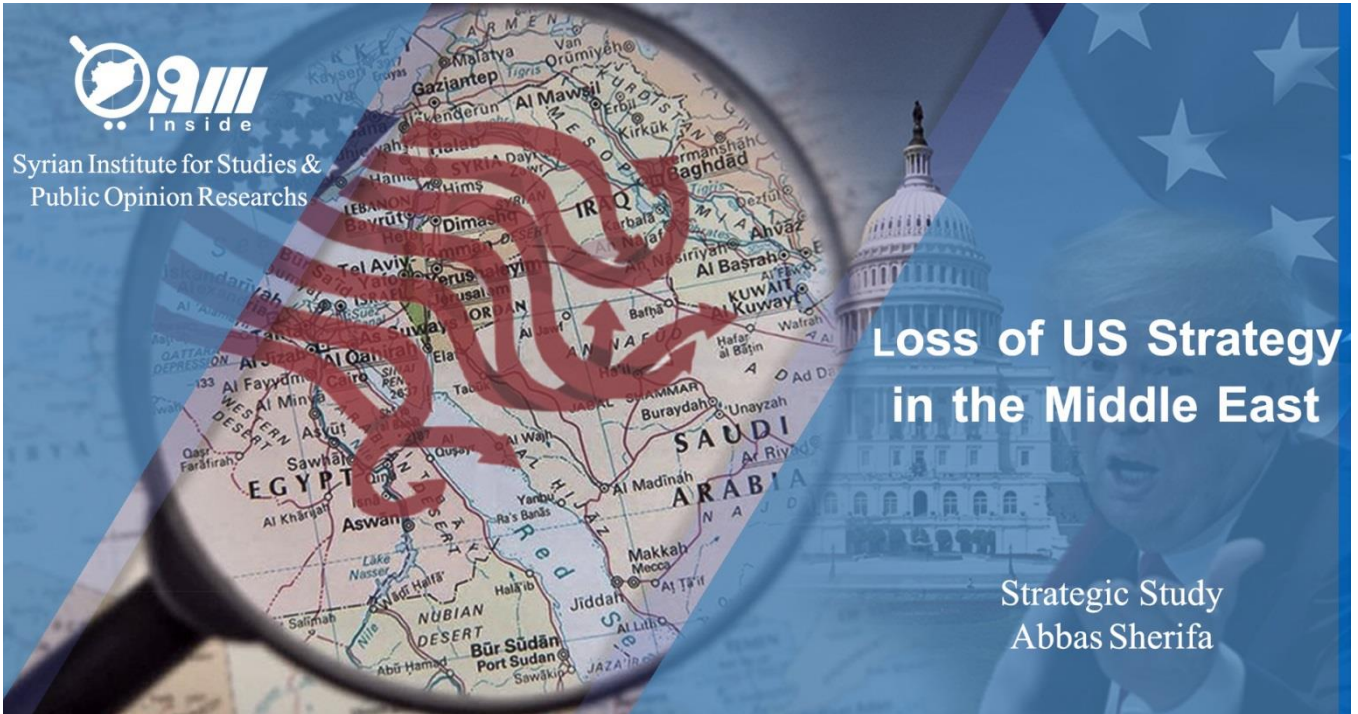




Syrian Institute for Studies &
Public Opinion Researchs



Loss of US Strategy in the Middle East

Strategic Study
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المؤسسة السورية للدراسات وأبحاث الرأي العام

SYRIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES & PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCHS

Introduction:

Due to its superficial treatment of phenomena of important issues like the elimination of the “ISIS” organization without seeking to tackle the objective reasons of extremism, the media, legislative and political voices of elites—criticizing the American administration—are escalating. Such reasons show in sectarianism, repression and the regimes of political tyranny in the Middle East allied to Washington. These elites also consider that the debate on an issue like the decision to withdraw from Syria is “absurd and ridiculous” for not informing the decision supporters or opponents of the problem in all its aspects. This reflects the state of cumulative failure resulting from the absence of an American strategy since it caused the collapse of Iraq.

Some researchers see it pointless to carry on the US military efforts in the Middle East because of the absence of an efficient strategy, the less insight, working purposelessly since waging a war on terrorism in 2001, getting involved in Arabian Gulf Wars since 2003 and interfering in the Syrian Dossier since 2011. They also argue that the debate in media and legislative fields in Washington is “silly and meaningless” as it addresses the assessment of US efforts in a country where the United States does not have specific and strategic objectives. The confusion in US policy has also been obvious in many issues related to Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Confusion in the Syrian File:

Concerning the political solution in Syria and despite the US administration emphasis on its commitment to the path of solution according to the Geneva Declaration and Security Council 2254 resolutions, it insists it will not force the regime to do so, but to only disable the Russian solutions. As for the decision to withdraw Us forces from Syria and though there is a debate on such decision among supporters and opponents, the volume of US troops does not represent a controversial issue in itself. Particularly, war in Syria resulted in 13 million people in desperate need, around 5 to 6 million refugees—most of them living in neighboring countries and 6 million emigrants internally.

According to the Center of Intelligence Agency, the size of Syrian economy has diminished to one third unlike what it was in 2011. In the same vein, Syria is ranked 194, out of 228 countries regarding the deterioration of the output of domestic production. Therefore, the United States must not confine its focus to eradicating the remnants of “ISIS” succession (“Khalifa”) or calling for a comprehensive cease-fire. On top of that, treating the strategic Syrian causes must occupy more space. Such a treatment includes addressing the following issues:

–The United States does not think about founding an effective and stable system of governing in light of the Sunni’s majority hatred of al-Assaad and the existence of many radicals that are not part of “Daesh” organization.

–How can stability be achieved in light of the inability to implement an effective humanitarian aid program and the lack of credible plans or expectations to rebuild Syria as a state, hence putting it on the path of stability for the sake of achieving a development that unites and helps confront extremism?

–How would the United States deal with Syria in light of an absence of the US strategy vis-à-vis the development of the Russian-Iranian and “Allah Party” in Syria together with the Turkish role in “Edlib” and the effect of Syrian refugees on the stability of the Lebanese in Jordan and Turkey?

Hesitation in the Iranian Dossier:

The US policy suffers from the lack of a plan to counter Iran’s efforts to build an air, naval and missile force in Gulf area. In return, it focuses on combatting its efforts to transfer weapons, money and volunteers to Syria under the pressure of Israeli desire. Moreover, Trump’s administration policy towards changing the system in Iran sounds divided and sometimes wobbling between a hope that sanctions will do their part and a plan for a military operation that might deteriorate the existing regime, in fact many countries in the region do not prefer to see a democratic transition in Iran.

The existing vision is based more on hope than on previous economic sanctions against Libya, Iraq and Syria. It is a policy that widened the gap between Netanyahu, who could not be persuaded by John Bolton, in his recent visit to Israel, concerning the usefulness of US measures against Iran. Even at the level of the contradictory statements between the CIA which believes that Iran is still committed to the applying nuclear agreement despite the United States' withdrawal from it, and the declarations of the Presidency, which confirms the ignorance of US intelligence on Iran's nuclear activity. Also, the US carrot-free policy toward Iran to push it to modify the nuclear deal does not encourage Iran to approve this amendment without economic insights.

The recent Bolton and Bamboo's tours in the Middle East failed, thus negatively affecting the project to establish a collaborative front against Iran in the region.

With Trump's senior advisers, namely Bolton and James Jeffrey, exchanged blame concerning this failure, Iraq's Prime Minister Adel abd-Elmahdi declared his refusal that Iraq would a starting line to confront Iran.

The Dilemma of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Dossier:

While Israel is facing new threats on its Northern borders from the Allah Lebanese Party and the Iranian military presence in Syria, no glimmer of hope is glittering that the plan to ensure peace with Palestinians will succeed after two years of Trump's presidency. Hence, the possibilities of implementing this plan sound very unlikely especially after the US administration's involvement in transferring its embassy to Jerusalem, thus making the United States biased rather than a credible mediator in moving peace negotiations. The talk of a century deal that will bring peace to the region still remains a false burden.

The Dossier of Tension Relations with Turkey:

The United States' loss of Turkey, its most important ally and the second power in the NATO, counts for the Russian-Turkish closeness and is one of the most significant events occurring in the last decade and marking the two countries' history. The secret of the sharp split within the US presidential institution and the Trump team towards improving relations with Turkey is no longer understood after the United States lost its alliance with anti-Turkish militia PYD classified on US lists among terrorist organizations.

The efforts of James Jeffrey, the US special envoy, failed to reform the strained relations with Turkey. This has not ceased the ongoing threat of intervention in the Syrian north in order to eliminate the PYD militia without coordinating with the United States which resorts to policy of procrastination and promises with Turkey without real commitment on the ground. More than that, Ardogan refuses to receive John Bolton who carried a demand for Ankara regarding Turkey's pledge not to harm the PYD forces, Washington's ally in its war on terrorism.

The Dossier of Failure in Iraq:

After 16 years of US intervention in Iraq, the latter is still witnessing a lot of deterioration as far as security and economic conditions are concerned. This is thought to be more dangerous for the United States than that in Syria especially in what concerns the state of instability and weakness of development projects. This goes hand in hand with the vital role that Iraq could perform in deterring Iran, defeating the "ISIS" organization, safeguarding Gulf Oil Flow and its impact on the international economy and trade with the United States. According to the standards of the World Bank, Iraq's coffer is bankrupt and its government is classified as the worst in the world. International Transparency Organization ranks it 11 in the corruption latter. The country has been suffering since the last elections. The government has also failed to meet the year's demand to recover from fighting "ISIS" and finding a solution to unite the Arab component there. The nation will need hundreds of billions of dollars to turn back to a stable path to development.

The Dossier of Gulf Security:

Security of the Arabian Gulf represents the source of the world energy, the most pressing challenge for Washington, which does not seem to have a global strategy for the region. Thus, Washington's allies in the Gulf are still unable to decide their fighting against the "Huthees" in Yemen where epidemics, poverty, famine and armed groups spread. Added to that, the US arm given to Washington's allies was handed to "Al-Qaeda" after countries of the Arabic allies had given it as bribery to some Yemeni tribal sheiks. After the failure of the visit of the US minister of foreign affairs Bombyou to narrow the gap between Gulf countries, Qatar's siege is still looming over the scene, draining the parties and weakening the Gulf front in confronting Iran. The US attention is paid to marginal causes like khashoggi's and issues of human rights that sounds political in nature, too without any serious treatment.

Till now, the existing administration appears unable to treat the aftermaths of the issue khashoggi's killing and to deal with the crisis in Yemen, to end the Saoudi Arabia-Arab-Emirates'-Bahrain boycott of Qatar together with these countries' inability to improve their missile defense symmetric systems to face the Iranian threats in the Gulf alone.

The confusion of the US Policy in Interpretation:

A number of researchers explain the reasons for the confusion of the US policy, the absence of strategy marking it and its tactical and sudden movements to the United States' lack of interest in the region and to its view of the Middle East as basic in the most important strategic battle against the Chinese frightening risky economic growth and the Russian military threat. Such a danger manifests itself in Washington's cancellation of the convention on the Prevention of Short- and Medium-Range- Missile Production with Moscow. Meanwhile, some others explain the reasons for this policy, devoid of strategy, by with reference to an American strategy, adopted by a number of American terrorists, arguing that the United States does not seek to solve any problem over the world, but to capture the threads of these problems, to manage them, to control them and

to encompass them in favor of the United States so that all problem parties remain in need of the United States.

A third group believes the problem lies in a struggle within the institutions of the US administration like that in Foreign Affairs, the Pentagon, and the CIA. Such a struggle also shows itself between the legislative institutions where the United States' interests are mixed with the agendas of pushing lobbyists from conflicting parties in the Middle East. While Trump declares his determination withdraw from Syria, the Congress fiercely opposes this step. Even Sezer is Act, which imposes sanctions on the Syrian regime, came out of Congress and was sent it to the president for ratification. The dispute between Trump and the Democratic legislators about the budget for the separation fence with Mexico has led to the government's longest-term closure with the president's insistence on financing the separation wall with Mexico. Adding to this, there are doubts among most of decision-makers in American institutions that Trump is surely a Russian breakthrough to the United States. Müller's fact-finding inquiries into information about the Russian support for Trump's electoral campaign in which serious and important details about Trump's involvement are still being investigated. The last team, however, explains confusion and lack of a comprehensive and stable strategy in the US policy by referring to Trump's stemming from the layers of traders and businessmen. This character runs the policy with the mentor of the bargain trader seeking-profits rather than with the politician's mentality that is governed by principles and driven by ambition and rationality.

This sounds blatant in many decisions taken with reference to his Tweeter account tweets or during a call with the Turkish president on the phone. Trump declares his withdrawal from Syria in a way that he did not even let Matisse, the Minister of Defence, know about the decision. This led the latter to announce his resignation without informing the Chief of Staff.

Conclusion:

The resigned US minister of Defense Matisse has summarized the issues describing Washington's policy in the Middle East, saying that: "it is an area devoid of strategies". He also considered the Democrats, the Republicans and experts around them are working in a way resembling changing the Middle East to a strategy-free zone. However, these temporary gains that the US administration is reaping, due to this volatility and fluctuation in policies, will not last. Such a policy would lead the presumed allies of the United States to a firm conviction of distrust in the US ally and a tendency to fill the vacuum towards more credible and consistent allies in policy-making and decision-making, which means the United States, will get out of the Middle East as a key player in the region. This loss in strategy will be irreplaceable for the United States. This loss in US strategy will not be replaced with the fragile tactical gains of a policy of volatility and instability.