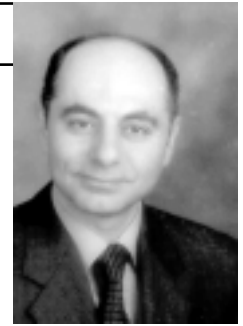

Interview: Dr. Imad Moustapha



What Is Behind the Neo-Con Offensive Against Syria?

Dr. Moustapha, Ph.D., is the Ambassador of Syria to the United States. Jeffrey Steinberg interviewed him in Washington on Nov. 17.

EIR: How do you assess the Bush Administration's policy toward your country at this time?

Moustapha: The more problems they get here on the internal, domestic front, the more they want to divert attention to an "external" enemy. They are becoming almost obsessed by Syria. Hardly a day passes, without one of the top Bush Administration officials making a statement about Syria. And I think this is an indication of how desperate they are to divert attention to an external crisis. And it's becoming sometimes extraordinary and amazing!

Let me give you just an example, and you will understand how they have lost their focus: Two weeks ago, a Syrian opposition leader came to Washington, D.C. He met with [National Security Advisor Stephen] Hadley, and he instigated the U.S. administration against Syria, just like [Iraq's Ahmed] Chalabi used to do. He went back to Syria. He was arrested by the Syrian police. He was told what sort of laws he had broken, and what the charges against him were, according to Syrian law. He then met with his attorney. He will be released on bail, and then he will face trial. He might be sentenced—the maximum penalty for his charges is something like three years in prison—or he might be considered innocent and released by the court. This happened.

Yet, Secretary Rice went to Bahrain, and she made a speech about this guy. Why, when simultaneously, she has in her own country, *hundreds*—hundreds—of political detainees in Guantanamo Bay, without knowing their charges, without ever meeting their attorneys, without even understanding how long they will remain in Guantanamo Bay? Some of them were already discharged—they stayed there for two years, and they were never told why they were imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay. So, she can sleep comfortably, with the fact that she has them in Guantanamo Bay, while she is upset because the Syrian law is being legally applied to a Syrian citizen within the proper judicial channels!

And, having said this, she does not even consider the situation in Iraq, where political detainees are being tortured, and where political assassinations are taking place on a semi-daily basis, and where their corpses are dumped in the streets.

And then, she's awfully absurd, with one person who has broken the law in Syria, and who is being tried according to the proper judicial framework.

So, what I'm trying to say is, this is just an example of how this administration has become obsessed by Syria.

Now, if you go back a little bit earlier, and you see the United States Ambassador to the United Nations comments on Syria, John Bolton, you will understand the ideological and doctrinal hatred they have for Syria. It has nothing to do with what Syria is doing, or what Syria has done, at all! Actually, it has only to do with only one thing: how they ideologically regard Syria. And when you see how the Mehlis report [on the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri] has been politically used against Syria, how John Bolton suddenly has become the firm believer in the United Nations, you can believe that this is preposterous! For years, he has ridiculed the United Nations, and has said the United Nations' sole legitimacy is that the United States is a part of it. And suddenly, he's become a strong advocate of the United Nations!

Having said this, he forgets that there is a stockpile of United Nations Security Council resolutions, demanding Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, and he *absolutely* ignores these United Nations resolutions. This tells you a lot about the double standards of these people.

EIR: A number of critics of the Bush Administration here in Washington, specifically former National Security Council official Flynt Leverett and journalist Seymour Hersh, are both basically saying that the Bush Administration has a policy of "regime change on the cheap" against Syria, and they trace this policy back, long before the supposed incidents that have now brought this all on—the Hariri assassination and other things. Do you share that view, that that's what Washington is pursuing, and it's a long-standing policy?

Moustapha: Definitely, I agree with this. I have read many articles in your *Executive Intelligence Review* about the Clean Break¹ document, and this is a strong indicator of how these

1. "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," was issued in 1996 by the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in Jerusalem, to shape the policies of Benjamin Netanyahu's new Israeli government.



State Department Photo

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announces the nomination of John Bolton as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, March 7, 2005. Their “ideological and doctrinal hatred” for Syria, said Dr. Moustapha, “has nothing to do with what Syria is doing,” but is purely ideological.

policies were developed, and put in place years ahead of all of these mentioned incidents. They had an objective concerning the Palestinians, the Iraqis, and the Syrians, and they are moving forward with their objectives.

And yes, what Seymour Hersh and Flynt Leverett have pointed out, correctly, is that this administration is dogmatic in its approach to Syria. Even when Syria tries to show goodwill and to engage this administration, trying to show this administration that it’s both in our interest and your interest to engage and work together towards any problems that you might consider—they refuse! Because, they’re not looking for solutions. They are looking for means of implementing their ideology. And of redrawing the map of the Middle East, according to their ideology.

EIR: I’m sure you have had a chance to read the Mehlis report. I wonder if you want to comment on how you evaluate it.

Moustapha: This report is a catastrophic legal document. It starts by admitting that the Mehlis Commission will need months to years, in order to be able to build a file that can be submitted to a court of justice. And then, it states the long-established legal rules, that all are innocent until proven guilty. But once they mention these two things, then they start page after page of listing rumors, tell-tales, innuendoes, gossip—political statements—trying to incriminate Syria.

I think the only reason [UN investigator Detlev] Mehlis released his report at that early stage, and tried to implicate Syria in the assassination of Hariri, is to present a gift to

The authors included U.S. neo-cons Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, David Wurmser, and Meyrav Wurmser. For excerpts, see *EIR*, Sept. 20, 2002.

John Bolton and Company, and the United Nations Security Council, so that they can precipitate a United Nations Security Council resolution, that might impose sanctions on Syria, or might harm Syria, or damage Syria. And they wouldn’t care at all, if this Mehlis Commission continued its investigations for a couple of years, or three, four, five years—nobody knows how long—and then after a very long period of time, Mehlis might come out with a result, saying, “You know what? I don’t think Syria was involved in this crowd,” or “I have failed to reveal the truth about this assassination”—but who will care?

What the United States wanted was, to use this present Mehlis report, full of gossip and innuendo, without a single shred of hard-core evidence that can be accepted in a court of law, to pass a resolution that will harm and damage Syria and the Syrian people. Now, this is very similar to what has happened in Iraq. They were leveling accusations about Iraq’s WMDs, and they passed resolutions and they invaded Iraq, and today, everybody knows that those accusations were untrue and false—but who gives a damn? Nobody cares.

EIR: I mentioned to you earlier, that the results of the Labor Party elections in Israel, with the election of Mr. Peretz as the new party chairman, have prompted some people here in Washington—not in the administration, unfortunately, but other people—to take up the question of revisiting a comprehensive approach to solving the Middle East problem, that would, again, put the question of Israel-Syria negotiations on the Golan Heights and other issues, back on the table. Do you see any prospect of that?

Moustapha: Well, it’s too early to change right now. . . . Everybody knows that Sharon is adamantly against the resumption of peace talks with Syria. He’s doing everything possible to undermine the peace talks with the Palestinians.

We, in Syria, repeat our strategic position toward Israel: We want to engage Israel in peace negotiations. We want to regain our occupied Golan, which is a part of Syria. And we want to establish peaceful, normal relations with Israel. But, in order to do this, we need to be engaged in negotiations. The Sharon government in Israel has categorically refused and rebuffed every Syrian initiative to re-engage with Israel.

So, at least we can see that today, there is a new political reality in Israel. This potentially might lead to a change in the Israeli government. We are very hopeful, that if this happens, then Israel will end up with a new leadership, that firmly believes that the only exit strategy for Israel, and its neighbors, from this ongoing cycle of violence and counter-violence, and instability in our region, is to sit with all Israel’s Arab neighbors and reach a comprehensive [exchange] of views to have a peace agreement.

So, my comment would be: Let us wait and see, let us be hopeful and optimistic. But also, we have to be realistic, as well.



U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 1st Class Shane T. McCoy

A foreign combatant being held at the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Secretary Rice is not concerned with the fact that such prisoners have been held for two years without any charges being filed against them, says Dr. Moustapha, yet "she is upset because the Syrian law is being legally applied to a Syrian citizen within the proper judicial channels!"

EIR: I noticed a number of statements from senior Israeli military officials, several weeks ago, when the real fury of regime-change talk in Washington was building up. I don't recall whether it was the Defense Minister or some Israeli military intelligence official, who warned about jumping into a kind of American regime-change attempt in Syria, saying that it was not necessarily in the interests of the region for that to happen. Do you recall that?

Moustapha: I don't want to discuss in particular what various Israeli politicians or military leaders comment on Syria. But, what I want to say is, in a way, we are just like every country in the world, we have some wise men and some extremist hardliners. Now, the extremist hardliners were actually encouraging the United States administration to become more intransigent against Syria.

Any Israeli that has a certain amount of wisdom and logic, would see that more instability in the region would only have a detrimental effect on everybody else, *including* Israel itself. So, they are not stupid. And they understand that Syria has a government that has been advocating a peaceful solution to a number of these crises, and they think that their hardline government is encouraging another hardline government in Washington, D.C., to cause more chaos and instability in the region, and this is not useful even to Israel itself. What Israel needs is, a peaceful settlement, not more violence and chaos and instability.

What sort of a twist in the logic is this, that is prevailing in Tel Aviv and Washington, today? I think the guy who sold them the concept of "constructive chaos" has been very cunning, but he is misleading them, and he will cause catastrophes to all parties—in the Middle East, and also here

in the United States.

EIR: I don't know if you saw, that I wrote a piece a few weeks back, that the doctrine of the neo-conservatives is really one of perpetual war, and permanent revolution [*EIR*, Sept. 23]. And that, ironically Cheney and these right-wing neo-conservatives are preaching a kind of revolutionary doctrine that was associated with some of the early Bolshevik revolutionaries.

Moustapha: Trotskyites, yes?

EIR: Yes, exactly.

Moustapha: Actually, I remember one of the icons of the neo-conservative movement, Michael Ledeen, once said that "great wars bring great peace." And that he thinks that war is the culmination of human achievement.

EIR: Exactly.

Moustapha: This twisted ideology—I'm saddened to have to admit—is prevailing among neo-conservative circles, and this is

dangerous! This is dangerous to America. But it's also dangerous to my country, because in the world's unique power, if such ideologues penetrate the administration and become influential within the inner circles of this administration, then this will have very bad omens for the whole world.

EIR: Well, obviously, one of the leading neo-conservative ideologues, who was the chief of staff and the chief national security advisor to the Vice President, [I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby], has now been criminally indicted and forced to resign. And I think that there are indications that the American people, also, are starting to see the tremendous problems that have been caused by this neo-con apparatus. And we're hopeful that we're going to see regime-change developments here in the United States—under our Constitutional procedures. But as you know, we're looking for a further shake-out within the Bush Administration, which hopefully will be a starting point for a whole new policy-direction—particularly towards the Middle East region.

Moustapha: As a foreign diplomat, I'm not going to comment on what's happening with the American administration. I'm only hopeful that the American people will realize the gravity of the ideology of those neo-conservatives, and they will do their best to rid America of such a dangerous ideology, because it only leads to war, death, and destruction.

EIR: On that note, I want to thank you very much for your time. And hopefully we'll be seeing some of these positive developments.

Moustapha: Whenever you want, whenever you want. I wish you the best of luck and success.