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## From Syria to Iran: The Dynamics of Global Power

By Miguel Villagra

September 27, 2013

*Lawrence Wilkerson, the former chief of staff to Colin Powell, has blamed senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham of being “close to traitors”. His statement comes ahead of the upcoming UN meeting in which Iran will be thoroughly discussed. In an exclusive interview with the Voice of Russia, he told what reaction he expects to his statement and shares his opinion on the Syrian issue and prospects of US-Iranian relations.*

*Voice of Russia: What reaction do you expect from senators McCain and Graham to your statements, if any?*

Lawrence Wilkerson: I’m too insignificant for them to react on my statements. But I will say this – for whatever reason in the last 18-20 hours they have calmed down a bit and their statements, while not being supportive of the President, are at least not as divisive and as antagonistic as they’ve been in the past. So, I like to think that my friends, my colleagues and others within the Republican Party and elsewhere, who’ve been working on this, have had some effect.

*VOR: And as a Republican, your views could be seen as quite liberal. Is there anything strange in that?*

LW: Well, I chose to call them progressive and remind everyone that Theodore Roosevelt was probably the leading progressive at the end of the 19th century, beginning of the 20th century and he was every bit of Republican. So, I would term my views “progressive” – that is to say – I’m a conservative, but I’m willing to look at things that might need changing for the future. And I’m even willing to look at fundamental things that might need changing.

*VOR: Recently you criticized both the Republican Party and the Bush administration. Could you give us a few examples as to what exactly you see as the problems?*

LW: I think the President has, for whatever reasons – political opportunism, genuine belief in a proper foreign and security policy – I don’t care what these reasons are, I think he’s crafted a very substantial sanctions regime, probably, the most effective, the most draconian in the history of sanctions. And I see that regime as being utterly useless, unless it is to be used as leverage in meaningful and substantial negotiations with Iran. That is to say – if we are not willing to *quid pro quo* with them, if they will not enrich above 5%, if they will allow the IAEA to do rigorous inspections, if they will be forthcoming with the previous historical work on their nuclear program and so forth, we will give them in return substantial sanctions relief.

Otherwise, the sanctions regime makes no sense, except very nefariously (and I suspect this of Graham and McCain, and Menendez in the Democratic Party and others, Netanyahu, for example), unless the sanctions are just designed to make the US look a little bit more legitimate before it uses force against Iran. In that case I think the President and the sanctions regime are in essence very dangerous. But if they are indeed designed to be leverage in meaningful negotiations, I’m all for it.

*VOR: Do you think that Congress will vote for the military action on Iran?*

LW: Graham has promised that he is going to bring up legislation authorizing military force in Iran. I don’t know what the conditions will be. I doubt that they will be as forthcoming as, for example, Prime Minister Netanyahu wants them to be but, nonetheless, they’ll tend to wrap the President in a steel embrace out of which he can’t break in order to achieve a meaningful diplomatic solution. So, that’s what I say about why their actions previously had bordered on treason, because they were preventing the President of the US, who after all was elected... not them, not the Republicans, Barack Obama was elected and he was elected to do foreign policy in the way that he saw fit, and this is the way he sees fit. So, not to give him room to accomplish something in this diplomacy with Iran and thereby prevent the use of force by Israel or the US is bordering on treason, in my view.

*VOR: Do you think that the UN will go in Iran’s favor?*

LW: I think the UN acts, especially under the Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, more or less along the lines that the West wants him to act, particularly the US. So, we’ve got the Head of the IAEA who is also sort of predisposed to the US, the Secretary General who is sort of predisposed to the US and we’ve got other states on the Security Council, like China and indeed Russia who more or less for their own purposes – opportunistic and otherwise – are trying to keep the Security Council “honest”. And that’s really the way this system was designed.

So, I'm not one of these people to say that negative votes, vetoes in the Security Council are necessarily bad. If we get something out of the Security Council that 1) puts Syria's chemical weapons under international supervision and then destroys them and 2) prevents war with Iran – I'm all for that. And by the way, when we are talking about chemical weapons and Syria destroying them, Russia hasn't destroyed its chemical weapons yet, nor has the US. And we've been working on it since about 1979 in the US. So, it is about time we put up or shut up where we are talking about making other countries do things that we haven't even done.

*VOR: Very well said! According to the recent documentary that you were a part of – “The Four Horsemen”, which is a great film, by the way, would you consider the events that we are discussing now a part of this fall of the empire? And how does Russia play in this fall of the empire?*

LW: I think so. I've got real problems with the way the dynamics of global power is developing right now. You really have sort of a tri-polar situation developing. You have Beijing on the one hand growing increasingly powerful every day. You have Russia under Putin where he has a considerable, if to believe the polls in Russia, a considerable support from the Russian people. And in many respects their GDP debt and so forth and so on is looking better than the US's. And then, you have the US – the teacher or the leader of the Western empire in grievous economic and financial trouble right now, which has done nothing to redress, it simply has postponed another inevitable reckoning, for example, with the big banks, because it hasn't done anything to redress their errors.

So, we are looking at a tri-polar situation any one of which poles could stumble and cause real world problems at any moment, not to mention the turmoil in Western Asia, particularly in the ME and problems in the rest of the world. So, this is not a happy time to be living, if you will, especially when you look at all the challenges we all need to confront together. And I'm talking about climate change, I'm talking about energy, I'm talking about dwindling water, for example. The precipitate cause of the civil war in Syria was water and the lack there of – that's what caused people to stand up and oppose Assad – because they were dying and their farms were dying, and their crops were dying. They had no water. Part of the problem there is Israel controlling the water from the Golan Heights and not allowing Syria to have any.

So, there are significant challenges in this world that we need to confront more or less together. And we are ignoring them, while we are fighting all these little tactical problems.