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US frustration as its hegemony declines

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The Syrian authorities opted to hold a presidential election on June 3. Bashar al-Assad is one of the three candidates. The international media generally assume that there is no doubt that Bashar al-Assad will win re-election. In spite of public discontent with the current situation and a desire for change, the essence of the Syria crisis is that foreign forces have tried to interfere in Syria's internal affairs, provoking a civil war in an attempt to overthrow the Syrian government.

The US President Barack Obama announced on August: "The rule of Bashar al-Assad has lost its legitimacy and he must step down." However, far from falling, Bashar al-Assad has secured another three years in power, for many reasons. Most importantly, the United States has made no direct military strikes against Syria. Why did the U.S. military decide not to wield the big stick this time?

Boogged down by its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the peak of the United States hegemony is past. The U.S. economy crashed during the 2008 financial crisis, triggering further domestic issues. Coupled with the rise of the emerging economies, it is an indisputable fact that the dominance of the U.S.A. is in decline. Increasingly powerless to halt this decline, the United

States is at a loss. Through his implementation of the "Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy" in 2011, Obama adjusted his Middle East policy by reducing investment in the Middle East, slowing down the implementation of the "new interventionism" and seeking shelter in stability.

A war in Syria is now contrary to its global strategy, and it would leave the U.S. facing too many associated difficulties. In August 2013, the West contrived the Syrian 'chemical weapons' crisis. The United States schemed with the United Kingdom to threaten Syria, declaring its intention to carry out a limited military strike. But 59% of Americans were opposed to aiding the Syrian opposition.

The UK Parliament forced their government to abandon its war plans. Obama had to accept a Russian proposal to turn over control of Syria's chemical weapons in exchange for peace as an "acceptable" conclusion to the crisis.

Mr. Qian Wenrong, a reputable Chinese scholar, points out that after World War II and the Cold War, the United States has always been ready to make war, and has always been able to assemble a group of willing helpers. As a result, the U.S. suffers from the illusion that it can do whatever it wants. This time round, Obama's compromises on the Syrian "Chemical Weapons crisis" testify to the declining strength of the United States. The U.S. is weaker than before. The prime of U.S. hegemony has passed, and is perhaps fated to disappear for ever.

Some commentators suggest that Bashar al-Assad's participation in the 2014 presidential election will become an excuse for the U.S. to use military force.

However, the U.S. response to date has been firstly to claim that the elections are not legitimate and the U.S. will not accept the results, secondly to grant diplomatic status to the Syrian anti-government organization office in the U.S.A., and thirdly to provide \$ 27 million in aid to the Syrian opposition.

The United States and its allies may have plans for further actions, but so far there is no sign of any military strike against Syria. On May 28 Obama delivered a speech at West Point in which he stated that as far as Syria is concerned, while military action is not a solution, the United States will support the opposition against the authorities. The speech suggests that the option of direct military intervention has been ruled out. A political solution to the Syrian crisis represents the international consensus. But Western countries, led by the U.S., and some of the countries of

the Middle East, still insist on supporting the Syrian opposition and on demanding that Bashar al-Assad should step down as a prerequisite to any talks. Only a political solution will resolve this impasse .

As long as the U.S. continues to support the opposition, it will be difficult to end the Syrian civil war; as long as the United States does not launch direct military strikes, Bashar al-Assad's regime will not be overthrown.

Efforts are still being made to find a political solution to the crisis, but if neither side is willing to change its attitude, any such efforts will be in vain. The Syrian crisis could drag on. The crisis has not evolved in the way that the U.S wished. Not only has Bashar al-Assad refused to step down, he will be re-elected as a president. His continuance in power is a frustrating reminder to the U.S. of its declining hegemony.