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Obama Administration Working to Set Up Syrian Opposition Council

By John Glaser

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As part of its policy of regime change in Syria, the United States has been working on putting together a body of Syrian opposition leaders to replace the defunct Syrian National Council, and the new group [will meet next week in Qatar](#).

“The State Department has been heavily involved in crafting the new council as part of its effort oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and build a more viable and unified opposition,” [The Cable reports](#). Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with some of these Syrian activists in September when they were quietly flown in to New York, an event that went unpublished in the press until now.

“Dozens of Syrian leaders will meet in the Qatari capital, Doha, on Nov. 3 and hope to announce the new council as the legitimate representative of all the major Syrian opposition factions on Nov. 7, one day after the U.S. presidential election,” [The Cable](#) adds.

The council is supposed to serve as a viable interim government in the event that the Assad regime falls. But the technocrats in Washington putting this group together have very little local knowledge of the internal dynamics in Syria, and many opposition activists not included in the Doha meeting expect the effort to be another failed attempt to unify the opposition.

“Right now, the opposition groups are very vague and there’s no agreement on who’s representing who and what and where,” one opposition activist told [The Cable](#). “Right now there is a lot of risk that this will be another failed approach that will not achieve anything.”

Besides the famous lack of cohesiveness that has riddled previous such efforts, the other problem is that such a council is likely to have little in common with the rebel fighters in Syria, many of whom have committed war crimes, are linked with al-Qaeda, and aim to establish an Islamic state post-Assad, yet which still continue to receive aid from the US and its allies.

“We have to get [the internal opposition] to bless the new political leadership structure they’re setting up and not only do we have to get them to bless the structure, but they have to get the names on it,” an administration official told *The Cable*.

The influence of the Syrian opposition’s other primary backers – Saudi Arabia and Qatar – should be enough to establish that US meddling in setting up a potential interim group is unlikely to produce a democratic, rights-conscious replacement for Assad.

But Washington seems clueless: “We call it a proto-parliament. One could also think of it as a continental congress,” a senior administration official told *The Cable*.