

Tulsi Gabbard vs. 'Regime Change' Wars

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard is a rare member of Congress willing to take heat for challenging U.S. "regime change" projects, in part, because as an Iraq War vet she saw the damage these schemes do, as retired Col. Ann Wright explains.

By Ann Wright

I support Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, going to Syria and meeting with President Bashar al-Assad because the congresswoman is a brave person willing to take criticism for challenging U.S. policies that she believes are wrong.

It is important that we have representatives in our government who will go to countries where the United States is either killing citizens directly by U.S. intervention or indirectly by support of militia groups or by sanctions.

We need representatives to sift through what the U.S. government says and what the media reports to find out for themselves the truth, the shades of truth and the untruths.

We need representatives willing to take the heat from both their fellow members of Congress and from the media pundits who will not go to those areas and talk with those directly affected by U.S. actions. We need representatives who will be our eyes and ears to go to places where most citizens cannot go.

Tulsi Gabbard, an Iraq War veteran who has seen first-hand the chaos that can come from misguided "regime change" projects, is not the first international observer to come back with an assessment about the tragic effects of U.S. support for lethal "regime change" in Syria.

Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Maguire began traveling to Syria three years ago and now having made three trips to Syria. She has come back hearing many of the same comments from Syrians that Rep. Gabbard heard – that U.S. support for "regime change" against the secular government of Syria is contributing to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Syrians and – if the "regime change" succeeded – might result in the takeover by armed religious-driven fanatics who would slaughter many more Syrians and cause a mass migration of millions fleeing the carnage.

Since 2011, the Obama administration supported various rebel groups fighting for "regime change" in Syria while U.S. allies – Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey – backed jihadist groups including Islamic State and Al Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, some of the same extremists whom the U.S. military is fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. If Assad were overthrown, these extremists might take power and

create even worse conditions for Syrians.

This possibility of jihadists imposing perverted extremist religious views on the secular state of Syria remains high due to international meddling in the internal affairs of Syria. This “regime change” project also drew in Russia to provide air support for the Syrian military.

Critical of Obama’s ‘Regime Change’

During the Obama administration, Rep. Gabbard spoke critically of the U.S. propensity to attempt “regime change” in countries and thus provoking chaos and loss of civilian life.

On Dec. 8, 2016, she introduced a bill entitled the “Stop Arming Terrorists Act” which would prohibit the U.S. government from using U.S. funds to provide funding, weapons, training, and intelligence support to extremists groups, such as the ones fighting in Syria – or to countries that are providing direct or indirect support to those groups.

In the first days of the Trump administration, Rep. Gabbard traveled to Syria to see the effects of the attempted “regime change” and to offer a solution to reduce the deaths of civilians and the end of the war in Syria. A national organization Veterans For Peace, to which I belong, has endorsed her trip as a step toward resolution to the Syrian conflict.

Not surprisingly, back in Washington, Rep. Gabbard came under attack for the trip and for her meeting with President Assad, similar to criticism that I have faced because of visits that I have made to countries where the U.S. government did not want me to go – to Cuba, Iran, Gaza, Yemen, Pakistan, North Korea, Russia and back to Afghanistan, where I was assigned as a U.S. diplomat.

I served my country for 29 years in the U.S. Army/ Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. I also served 16 years in the U.S. diplomatic corps in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. I resigned from the U.S. government nearly 14 years ago in March 2003 in opposition to President George W. Bush’s “regime change” war on Iraq.

In my travels since my resignation, I didn’t agree with many of the policies of the governments in power in those countries. But I wanted to see the effects of U.S. government policies and, in particular, the effects of attempts at “regime change.”

I wanted to talk with citizens and government officials about the effects of U.S. sanctions and whether the sanctions “worked” to lessen their support for

the government that the U.S. was attempting to change or overthrow.

For making those trips, I have been criticized strongly. I have been called an apologist for the governments in power. Critics have said that my trips have given legitimacy to the abuses by those governments. And I have been called a traitor to the United States to dare question or challenge its policy of "regime change."

But I am not an apologist, nor am I a traitor ... nor is Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard for her recent trip to Syria.

Ann Wright served 29 years in the US Army/Army Reserves and retired as a colonel. She also was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and served in U.S. Embassies in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned in March 2003 in opposition to the war in Iraq. She has lived in Honolulu since 2003. [A version of this story originally appeared at

<http://www.civilbeat.org/2017/02/why-i-support-tulsi-gabbard-going-to-syria/#.WKU0jn7-I5I.twitter>
