

Will Mideast Fuse for World War III Be Lit?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Nov. 20—As of this moment, efforts to reach a ceasefire in the week-long Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, which began with the assassination of a prominent Hamas official, are ongoing but deadlocked in Cairo. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen is awaiting a formal request from Turkey to deploy Patriot III anti-missile batteries to the southern region of the country bordering Syria, in a move that could soon pit NATO directly against Russia in a border war.

These events, along with the still-pending prospect of an Israeli or U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran by early next year, are all indicative of a Middle East cockpit that could be the trigger for global war, just as the Balkan region was the cockpit for what came to be known as World War I.

While these crises have been unfolding for months, and even years, it was the re-election of President Barack Obama on Nov. 6 that was seen as the green light for the escalation of all of these crisis fronts at once.

As the election results were being announced in the United

States, British Prime Minister David Cameron was touring the Middle East, pressing for a major escalation against Syria. And Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took the first opportunity to order the long-planned assassination of Ahmed Jaabari, the military commander of Hamas in Gaza, and the lead negotiator for the Hamas-Israel ceasefire talks. The Jaabari assassination was calculated by Netanyahu and his Defense

Minister Ehud Barak to trigger Hamas major rocket retaliation against Israel, providing the perfect pretext for Operation Pillar of Defense, the Israeli bombing campaign against the Gaza Strip, which has already resulted in over 100 deaths—many of them innocent women and children—thousands of injuries, and the destruction of much of the economic infrastructure of Gaza.

Prelude to World War

The ongoing assault on Gaza is widely viewed as a first phase of a larger war plan by Israel, with full support from Britain. If the scheme goes forward, Israel will conduct fur-



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Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu wants NATO to deploy a missile-defense system to the border with Syria.

ther bombings against strategic targets in Gaza and then accept a ceasefire deal, already being brokered by Egypt, with backing from Russia, the Arab League, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

At some point in the very near future, Israel will launch a similar heavy bombing campaign against its neighbor to the north, Lebanon, to wipe out Hezbollah's fortified positions in the south of the country. Following the failed 2006 Israeli invasion, Hezbollah has stockpiled a formidable arsenal of longer-range rockets and missiles that can reach the key population centers in Israel.

Israel's goal in this effort is to severely cripple the asymmetric retaliatory capabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah *before* a full-scale war is launched against Iran.

Senior Israeli defense officials have said that they are certain that the P5+1 talks with Iran will break down in the coming weeks, putting the United States in the position where it will be forced to support military action.

The Gaza bombing campaign has also addressed several other Netanyahu concerns. He is facing Knesset elections on Jan. 22. By launching the latest Gaza invasion, Netanyahu has deflected attention from Israel's economic troubles, a serious vulnerability for Netanyahu and his Likud coalition, and put the focus once again on the security threats—even if those threats have been amplified by Netanyahu-Barak's latest genocide against the Palestinian population of Gaza.

Lyndon LaRouche warned today that Netanyahu's assault on Gaza has unleashed forces that cannot be controlled or contained. The entire Southwest Asia region is going through a profound upheaval. The Muslim Brotherhood is now in power in Egypt, Turkey, and Tunisia, and there are prospects of Islamist takeovers in neighboring Jordan and Syria—fueled by heavy funding from Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Far more radical than the Brotherhood are the neo-Salafist networks, also financed from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have been unleashed throughout the region, as evidenced by the “new 9/11” attack in Benghazi, Libya, in which the U.S. ambassador and three American intelligence officers were killed.

How, LaRouche asked, will these Islamists respond to the latest Israeli genocide in Gaza? Where will they direct their hatred? At the moment, these networks have been heavily engaged in the Western-backed campaign to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria. Will they now unleash a global campaign against Israel and its perceived backers in the Obama Administration?

These new unknown factors in the Middle East war equation will now play out in ways that no one can predict or control. These are precisely the kinds of miscalculations that can lead to general war.

Further Military Buildups

The Israeli launching of Operation Pillar of Defense came during the final days of the largest joint U.S.-Israeli missile-defense maneuvers in history, Austere Challenge 12. The U.S. deployed advanced Patriot III missile-defense systems, along with Navy destroyers with Aegis missile-defense systems, to the eastern Mediterranean for the joint maneuvers. Some of the U.S. destroyers have been ordered to remain in the region, and three additional U.S. Navy ships have been ordered back to the eastern Mediterranean, should it become necessary to evacuate Americans from the region.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced today that his government was readying a formal request to NATO to deploy Patriot III missile-defense batteries to the southern Turkey region bordering on Syria. Ostensibly, the deployment is to counter mortar and rocket fire from Syria that has hit villages in southern Turkey. However, these advanced Patriot III batteries are not designed to intercept such low-grade rockets and mortars. While Turkey denies that the request for NATO assistance is tied to plans to establish a no-fly zone in northern Syria, these denials are not credible.

Within hours of President Obama's re-election, Prime Minister Cameron announced that his government was planning to boost military aid to the Syrian rebels, and was studying how to bypass the existing UN arms embargo. Britain and France have now recognized the newly minted Syrian opposition as the “sole legitimate representatives of the Syrian people,” a de facto announcement of commitment to overthrow the Assad government by whatever means necessary.

At a September 2012 press conference on Capitol Hill, hosted by Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, the former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, warned that a NATO-backed no-fly zone over northern Syria could trigger world war. What if Russia provided Syria with their most advanced air defense systems?, Wilkerson asked. How long would it take before Russian anti-aircraft batteries shot down American or NATO fighter jets patrolling the no-fly zone? How close would that bring us to general war between the great powers?