

# Israel Takes the Lead in Empire War Drive on Syria

by Jeffrey Steinberg

May 6—FLASH: Judge Carla Del Ponte, the Swiss jurist who is conducting the United Nations inquiry into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, gave an interview to Swiss media today, in which she reported that the investigation to date has confirmed the use of deadly sarin gas. Based on eyewitness accounts and interviews with medical doctors who treated the injured, Del Ponte announced the preliminary conclusion that the chemical weapons were used by Syrian rebels. There was no evidence so far indicating any use of such weapons by the Syrian Army.

The UN stated that the full report of the investigating team would not be completed for another month. However, the Del Ponte revelations represent a setback for those who are calling for immediate military intervention to overthrow the Assad government, based on the claim that he had “crossed a red line” by using chemical weapons. Sources in Washington report that the Del Ponte announcement strengthens the hand of Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), who has been arguing for caution and opposes any U.S. military intervention into Syria.

May 5—Within a period of 72 hours, Israel reportedly launched missile attacks against targets inside Syria, prompting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to accuse Israel of declaring war on his country—in alliance with al-Qaeda and the other terrorist elements waging a two-year regime-change campaign against his government.

On May 3, and again early this morning, Israeli missiles hit targets in and around Damascus, including a research site at Jamraya in the mountains outside the capital, and at Damascus Airport.

U.S. intelligence sources dismissed Israeli claims that they were targeting weapons shipments to Hezbollah in Lebanon, noting that the sites that were targeted were, indeed, weapons depots. What changed the situation on the ground, according to the U.S. sources, is that the Syrian Army has retaken a vital highway between the capital and the Lebanese border that had been in the hands of Western- and Saudi/Qatari-backed rebels for months. There is no evidence of any planned movement of arms to Lebanon.

Despite fierce opposition from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Obama is moving to directly arm the Syrian rebels, despite the growing power of radical neo-Salafists aligned with al-Qaeda in the Syrian opposition. Under intense pressure from London and Paris to begin providing advanced weapon systems to the rebels, the White House is, according to the U.S. intelligence sources, preparing to give lethal support to the rebels. Those supplies are to begin prior to Obama’s scheduled June meeting in Russia with President Putin, on the sidelines of the G-8 heads of state summit.

## **U.S. Military Says No**

The policy fight inside the Obama Administration over the Syria situation went public in the past week,

when General Dempsey held a meeting with defense reporters at the offices of the *Christian Science Monitor* April 30. Dempsey stated that the United States has no viable military options in Syria, including the establishment of the “no-fly zone” which chicken-hawks in Congress and other mouthpieces for the British imperial strategy are demanding. Any action will draw the U.S. deeper into total war, and do nothing to achieve a peaceful outcome of the crisis.

“About 10% of the casualties that are being imposed on the Syrian opposition are occurring through the use of air power,” Dempsey said. “The other 90% are by direct fire or by artillery,” although those numbers could vary by two to three points in either direction. “So, the question then becomes, if you eliminate one capability of a potential adversary, will you be inclined to find yourself in a position to be asked to do more against the rest?” he asked. So, not only might a no-fly zone, if it were successfully established—and even that’s not a guarantee—not accomplish what its advocates are demanding, but its failure to accomplish those objectives could then create the demand to take further measures, thus sucking us deeper into the war.

But Dempsey didn’t stop there. “I have to assume,” he said, “that the potential adversary isn’t just going to sit back and allow us to impose our will on them—that they could, in fact, take exception to the fact that we are employing a no-fly zone and then act outside of their borders.” This action, he said, could include “long-range rockets, missiles, artillery, or even asymmetric threats”—Pentagon parlance for actions that range from roadside bombs to cyber attacks. The U.S. military could indeed impose a no-fly zone, but whether or not it would generate the desired effect—an end to the violence and a stable Syria—is another question.

*“That’s the reason I’ve been cautious,” he said, “about the application of the military instrument of power: because it’s not clear to me that it would produce that outcome”* (emphasis added).

Dempsey’s warnings have been echoed in dozens of news stories and editorial comments, many by qualified intelligence officials. A number of news stories made the point that it was premature to assume that the rebels could defeat the Assad government forces. The taking of strategic sites in several parts of the country by the Syrian Army bolstered this assessment, to the point that even the *Times of Israel* touted the possibility of Assad winning. A former British ambassador to Syria published an op-ed in the London *Sunday Telegraph* on

April 30, calling on both the U.S. and the U.K. governments to drop all support for the rebels, and make a deal with the Assad government for a political transition, in league with Russia.

Former CIA intelligence analyst Paul Pillar, in an April 30 column in *The National Interest*, makes the point that tiny pieces of evidence of alleged chemical weapons use in Syria have little to do with *why* the interventionists want war, and raises the specter of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, justified with *lies* about chemical weapons by Tony Blair’s government. Other columnists have emphasized that the opposition is dominated by jihadis, whose victory, to put it mildly, would not be in the interests of the United States, or stability in the region.

### **Israel Acts for War**

It was in the context of this fight inside the United States, that the Israeli Cabinet, on May 2, gave Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu authorization to bomb select targets inside Syria, on the grounds that “game changing” weapons were “about” to be shipped to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israeli Defense Forces were moved up to the borders with both Syria and Lebanon, and U.S. sources say that Israel has developed plans to create a buffer zone in southern Syria, like the buffer zone it maintained in southern Lebanon from 1978-2000.

The Israeli actions were not unilateral. In the past two weeks, President Obama, Secretary of State John Kerry, and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel have been conducting non-stop consultations with Israeli leaders and Arab leaders from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, the U.A.E., and Obama is to meet with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan soon in Washington.

U.S. officials have confirmed that, despite the strong JCS opposition, Obama has told top national security aides that the “Syria problem” must be resolved before the end of the year—meaning that Assad must be removed from power by then. While Obama made a series of public statements in the past 48 hours, claiming there are no plans to put “American boots on the ground” in Syria, this is pure sophistry. The model for the regime change against Assad is the campaign that was conducted in 2011 to oust Muammar Qaddafi from power in Libya—a U.S.-led campaign that has turned the country over to al-Qaeda-linked networks and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Joint Chiefs opposition to a Syrian no-fly zone is based on the recent Libya war, in which the creation of a no-fly zone was an act of war that guaranteed that

the U.S. would be leading a regime-change effort. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates resigned from the Obama Administration over his opposition to the no-fly zone, precisely because it was an act of aggressive war.

Syria is not Libya, and the ongoing effort against the Assad government will put the Obama Administration on a collision course with Russia.

### Next Target: Iran

In addition, President Obama continues to reassure Israel that the United States will never allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. Hagel has publicly confirmed that the U.S. will be updating and revising military options against Iran immediately after the Iranian Presidential elections in June. Clearly, the escalation of the regime-change drive against Assad in Syria is linked to the overall war plans for Iran. News reports today indicate that Washington is pursuing a “4+1” military alliance of Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Jordan, and Turkey, plus Israel, directed against Iran. While the news accounts claim that the effort is based on the possibility of “containment” of a nuclear-armed Iran, the reality is that Iran is next on the target list after Syria.

Lyndon LaRouche warned back in 2011 that the

British-steered Obama White House had intended to move immediately from Libyan regime change to similar actions against Syria, and then Iran. Strong opposition from the JCS and other patriotic forces had slowed that process, and the accelerated disintegration of the trans-Atlantic financial system had further complicated the effort. At the time, LaRouche had made the point that the real targets of the war drive were Russia and China—not Syria and Iran. Russian officials fully concurred with that assessment, and both Russia and China blocked any action at the United Nations to support regime change, and made clear that they were prepared to respond to U.S. and NATO aggression with asymmetric force.

The situation right now is that the Near East and Persian Gulf are on the very edge of full-scale war. Any delusions that the escalation in Syria can be contained within the borders of that targeted nation are delusional. The real danger in the coming days is that a desperate British Empire will use its tools, Obama and Netanyahu, to take the next step toward World War III.

Netanyahu has already played his hand. The question in the immediate hours ahead is whether Obama will be stopped.

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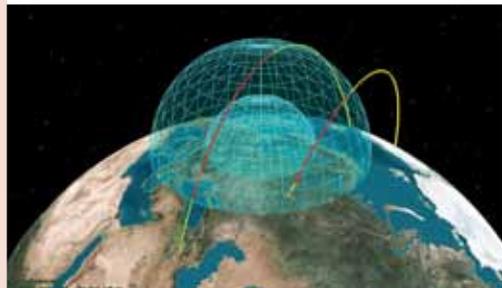
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