

Berserker Cheney Escalates Push for World War III

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Bush Administration, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, has again escalated its drive for senseless military action against Iran, through a combination of new unilateral sanctions against the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and a new hyperventilating propaganda push, led by the Vice President and President, aimed at provoking Tehran into providing a pretext for war. At the same time, anti-war forces around the globe—including Russian President Vladimir Putin, and some factions within the Bush Administration itself—have taken some extraordinary actions, aimed at averting an attack on Iran, that would almost certainly escalate out of control to global war.

One of the most stunning denunciations of the Cheney war schemes was delivered in Washington on Oct. 17 by Wesley Clark, a retired five-star general and former candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination. Speaking before several hundred American and Arab policy-makers at the 16th annual conference of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (NCUSAR), Clark urged a vigorous public debate on the Iran situation, leading to a new diplomatic dialogue with Tehran, and denounced the Bush Administration's war policies as part of a continuing "political coup d'état" that was carried out, from the White House, after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

Clark charged that, following 9/11, a small group inside the Bush Administration imposed a new strategy, without debate, without Congressional authorization, and without consultation with America's allies. Clark recounted a May 1991 private conversation he had with then-Pentagon official Paul Wolfowitz and his deputy Lewis "Scooter" Libby. Clark recounted Wolfowitz's berating of then-President George H.W. Bush, for failing to conclude Operation Desert Storm with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Wolfowitz told Clark that,

within "the next 5-10 years," the United States must overthrow a string of "former Soviet client-states," including Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Wolfowitz told the flabbergasted general that the United States would have that window of opportunity to "use military force with impunity" before a new, as-yet unknown "superpower" emerged to challenge American global military hegemony.

General Clark recounted that when then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, along with Wolfowitz and Libby, took their "Roman Empire" scheme to National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and President Bush, they were forcefully rebuked. After 9/11, Clark charged, Cheney and Wolfowitz resurrected the scheme, but never informed the American people or the Congress, because "they would have been laughed off the stage," and denounced for "flights of fantasy." Nevertheless, Clark reported, a written plan was circulated in the Rumsfeld Pentagon right after 9/11, listing seven regimes to be overthrown in the next five years: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia. Now, Clark concluded, "we are living with the consequences," including the \$800 billion spent to date on Iraq and Afghanistan. "The U.S. is weaker, our adversaries are stronger."

In response to a question from *EIR*, Clark urged diplomacy with both Iran and Syria. "Find common interests, avert war, and help our friends in the region," he demanded, asking, "Aren't we big enough to do this?" The alternative, he warned, is a two- to three-week bombing campaign, that will render Iran "a failed state," but with the most dire consequences for the United States and the world.

Putin Leads War-Avoidance

The message delivered by General Clark resonated throughout the two-day conference. It paralleled an escalation

of war-avoidance initiatives by leading international players, including President Putin. The Russian leader has engaged in a whirlwind of diplomacy, beginning with his two-day summit in Moscow earlier this month with French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy came in to the Moscow meeting, having joined the Cheney chorus, threatening that Iran's alleged pursuit of a nuclear weapon could lead to World War III. But in the meeting with Putin, Sarkozy, according to informed U.S. intelligence sources, tilted into the war-avoidance camp, under the weight of simultaneous pressure from the Russians and from circles within his own French military/intelligence institutions.

Putin next hosted U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for several days of talks with their Russian counterparts. Putin invited the Pentagon chief to address a Russian military academy, and privately signalled that the American proposal for settling the dispute over the planned deployment of U.S. anti-ballistic-missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, was a positive, albeit insufficient step. According to Washington sources, Gates proposed that Russian military observers could be stationed at the Eastern European missile defense sites, as well as at U.S. command installations.

Gates, in turn, told reporters during a stopover in Europe for a NATO-Russian conference, that the United States could possibly delay activation of the ABM sites, pending firm evidence that Iran possessed missiles capable of striking Europe. As Gates was delivering these hopeful remarks, Bush was issuing the message that the U.S. was hell-bent on deploying the ABM system on Russia's border.

During Putin's historic trip to Tehran, to attend a Caspian Sea heads-of-state meeting, he clearly signalled that Russia would strongly oppose any U.S. military action against Iran, while, at the same time, pressing the Iranian government to avoid any provocation that could give Cheney the pretext to attack. Reportedly, in his private meeting with Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Putin minced no words, in warning that the Bush-Cheney Administration *would* launch a devastating bombing campaign against Iran, if given the pretext. Russia clearly does not want another American war on its border.

According to U.S. intelligence sources, a huge political brawl is taking place behind the scenes in Tehran, over how to respond to the U.S. provocations and the Putin intervention. The latest Cheney provocation was announced on Oct. 25 by Rice and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson: Economic sanctions against the Revolutionary Guards.

World War III Rhetoric

In response to the wildly provocative speech by Vice President Cheney at the annual conference of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) on Oct. 21, pushing for military strikes against Iran, Putin delivered a tough retort, drawing a parallel to the U.S.-planned deployment of ABM

systems in Eastern Europe, to the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

In his WINEP speech, Cheney had warned Iran of "serious consequences" if it did not abandon its nuclear enrichment program, and its intervention into Iraq. Practically daring Iran to respond, Cheney ranted, "Given the nature of Iran's rulers, the declarations of the Iranian President, and the trouble the regime is causing throughout the region—including the direct involvement in the killing of Americans—our country and the entire international community cannot stand by as a terror-supporting state fulfills its most aggressive ambitions. The Iranian regime needs to know," Cheney concluded, "that if it stays on its present course, the international community is prepared to impose serious consequences."

In a clear warning to the Bush-Cheney Administration, Putin told reporters in Lisbon, Portugal, during a European-Russian annual summit, that the U.S. ABM deployment was "technologically similar" to the Cuban Missile Crisis of the 1960s. "Let me recall how relations shaped up in a similar situation in the mid-1960s," Putin told reporters. "Similar actions by the Soviet Union, when it deployed missiles in Cuba, provoked the Caribbean crisis. For us, technologically, the situation is very similar." However, Putin concluded that there was no danger of the situation escalating out of control, because Russia and the United States are "not enemies anymore," and President Bush is his "personal friend."

Just days earlier, Bush had babbled to reporters that Iran's pursuit of the "knowledge" of how to build a nuclear bomb could trigger World War III. "I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing Iran from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon," the President threatened.

Putin's Israel Play

Days after his Tehran excursion, Putin hosted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in Moscow, for talks also aimed at cooling down the rhetoric for World War III. Immediately after their talks, Putin dispatched a high-level Russian delegation for a week of talks in Israel. The delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov and special Middle East peace envoy Sergei Yakovlev, assured the Israelis that Russia is equally adamant about preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb, but cautioned, according to *Ha'aretz*, "The difference between us and you, is that you're basing yourselves on estimates, whereas we're basing ourselves on precise information. When we see that the situation is sufficiently dangerous, we'll know how to stop the Iranians, and if we want to, we can do this without difficulty."

At no point in recent history, has there been so much high-level diplomacy aimed at averting world war. But by the same token, the 9/11 "political coup d'état" at the White House, led by Cheney's team of berserkers, has not been defeated, and therefore, the danger of global conflagration cannot be underestimated for a moment.