

Russia, China Respond to BMD; Syria Conflict Deadlocked

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Jan. 14—Russia and China have responded forcefully to the Obama Administration's plans for a global ballistic missile defense system that the two powers view as part of a U.S.-NATO strategy of encirclement and containment. The Russian government has been warning for more than a year that the U.S. BMD deployment fundamentally alters the thermonuclear strategic balance, and sees it as part of an effort by Washington to develop a first-strike capability—20 years after the end of the Cold War and 30 years after President Ronald Reagan proposed U.S.-Soviet collaboration on a global strategic defense against thermonuclear weapons.

On Jan. 9, the head of the Russian National Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, was in Beijing meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Dai Binggou, in the latest of a series of Russian-Chinese strategic dialogues that began in 2004. At the end of the meetings, the two officials told reporters that they share a concern that the Obama Administration is deploying a global missile defense system directed against them, "including in the Asia-Pacific."

Since the beginning of the New Year, Russia has made a number of announcements about deployments of its own ABM system. Moscow announced in early January that it was installing new, state-of-the-art, Voronezh-class radar systems at three new sites: Krasnoyarsk, Altai, and Orenburg. These will give Russia a full early-warning-radar system against incoming bal-

listic missiles from every possible launch site.

At the same time that the announcement of the new radar deployments was being made, the Russian government invited Kazakhstan to join with Russia, Belarus, and Armenia in deploying a joint ballistic missile defense shield.

Russian Naval Maneuvers

The Putin government also announced that, on Jan. 28, Russia will stage the largest naval maneuvers since the end of the Cold War, in the Black Sea and eastern Mediterranean, involving 12 ships from its Baltic, Arctic, Black Sea, and Pacific fleets. Part of the maneuvers will take place off the coast of Syria. And Russia has announced the deployment of a new generation of submarines capable of launching strategic weapons. The first of the new class of submarines was commissioned last week, at a ceremony attended by President Putin.

These renewed warnings and actions by Russia, in collaboration with China, are the latest indication that the two powers are prepared to coordinate their responses to President Obama's "Asia pivot." The U.S. and NATO have deployed advanced Patriot missile batteries to NATO member Turkey, along with AWACS high-altitude surveillance planes. The United States has also accelerated the deployment of its own advanced radar systems along the southern tier of Russia, as well as Aegis ABM-equipped destroyers to the Spanish port



Russian Ministry of Defense

In response to the placement of the U.S./NATO missile defense system on Russia's borders, the Putin government has announced the largest naval maneuvers since the end of the Cold War. Here, a test firing of a cruise missile by the naval forces of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

of Rota, from where they can be deployed rapidly into the North Atlantic or Mediterranean.

U.S. intelligence sources confirm that, following the North Korean satellite launch last month, the Obama Administration is planning an accelerated ABM deployment into North Asia, ostensibly focused against the D.P.R.K., but also in the range of China. Should tensions rise in the Asia-Pacific region, Obama is contemplating the creation of an informal military alliance as the first step toward a NATO-style command structure, involving Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, and possibly even Vietnam.

While in and of themselves, these moves and counter-moves may not represent an immediate threat of thermonuclear war, they come in the context of escalating regional conflicts in the Persian Gulf, the eastern Mediterranean, and throughout Africa and South Asia, all of which could escalate into a general war drawing in all of the thermonuclear-weapons powers.

Sunni-Shi'ite Conflict

Senior U.S. intelligence sources have confirmed that the British Crown and British intelligence are promoting a permanent Sunni versus Shi'ite conflict within the Islamic world, that is already wreaking havoc in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. London, often referred to as

“Londonistan,” is notorious as a safehouse and logistics hub for a wide array of Sunni terrorist groups operating in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. These networks have been unleashed with a vengeance since the start of the year.

Last week, al-Qaeda in Iraq launched simultaneous terrorist attacks against Shi'ite targets in three parts of Iraq—Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Halla. Several days later, on Jan. 11, neo-Salafist terrorists in Pakistan carried out coordinated bombing attacks in Quetta, Karachi, and the Swat Valley, killing at least 122 Shi'ite worshippers and injuring hundreds of others.

These attacks will almost cer-

tainly trigger retaliatory attacks on Sunni targets, potentially worsening the sectarian conflicts among the world's 2 billion Muslims.

In Syria, such Sunni-versus-Shi'ite brutality continues to escalate, even as the two-year-long, foreign-backed, regime-change campaign against the Bashar al-Assad government remains deadlocked. The Assad government announced on Jan. 13 that the Syrian Army had re-taken control of a vital area between Damascus and the nearby international airport, further demonstrating that the Free Syrian Army is incapable of taking over the capital. At the same time, the Syrian Army has ceded territory in the north of the country to rebels, concentrating forces on the major urban areas of Aleppo in the north, and Damascus.

The lead story in the Jan. 13 *Washington Post* admitted that Assad is not about to fall anytime soon, and that the population has largely turned against the rebels, which have engaged in brutal executions and ethnic cleansing of Alawites, Shi'ites, and Christians. Josh Landis, who runs the widely read Syria Comment blog, recently wrote that he believes that Assad will still be in power in 2014.

Indeed, last week, President Assad delivered a televised address before a cheering audience in downtown Damascus. He made clear, as he has in private meeting

with UN and Arab League special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, that he has no intention of stepping down before his term expires next year; he called for a negotiated settlement and transitional process with legitimate opposition forces. He also denounced foreign powers for intervening in alliance with al-Qaeda.

With the armed rebels losing momentum, Brahimi met on Jan. 11 with Russian special envoy and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns in Geneva, to pursue a new proposal for a ceasefire and transitional government. While details of the dialogue were limited, the trio announced that they would continue to meet.

London's Regionwide Assault

The Syria crisis is but the most visible point in a regionwide assault, led from London, which is targeting a number of regimes. Jordan is on the verge of a social explosion; northern Lebanon is under siege by Saudi-funded neo-Salafist terrorists, who are sending weapons and jihadi fighters into neighbor Syria; and Iraq is in turmoil, as Saudi Arabia fuels a Sunni insurgency in the western provinces bordering on the Saudi Kingdom, aimed at creating a Sunni separatist buffer state.

Much of North Africa is also in a state of siege. This week, French troops were deployed into Mali, when Is-

lamist rebels, heavily armed from the stockpiles of weapons that were set free after Libya's Qaddafi was overthrown and assassinated in October 2011, took a crucial town in the middle of the country and threatened to overrun the capital (see article, below). In Libya itself, on Jan. 3, President Mohammed Megaryef was the victim of an attempted assassination. He survived the sniper assault, although three of his security guards were injured.

Every one of these crisis spots could be a flash-point for a larger war, given that both Russia and China have vital interests in the regions targeted for destabilization.

As the Syria situation moves into a new phase of prolonged conflict, barring a breakthrough in the "Three B" (Brahimi, Bogdanov, and Burns) talks, the issue of Iran continues to play out in the background. Sometime in the immediate weeks ahead, there will be another round of P5+1 talks among Iran, Russia, China, the United States, Britain, France, and Germany. If those talks do not produce a concrete agreement covering Iran's nuclear enrichment program, the clock will start ticking towards yet another Persian Gulf crisis. And if Syria, Libya, Mali, Jordan, Lebanon, or North Korea do not produce a larger global confrontation, any military conflict with Iran will be a certain trigger for general war.

Prince Bandar's al-Nusra Terrorists in Syria

Jan. 14—Citing the Paris-based Intelligence Online newsletter, Al Manar TV of Lebanon reported earlier this month that Saudi intelligence, led by Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, is bringing the jihadis, who are waging a civil war against the Syrian forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, under the umbrella of the al-Nusra Front, an arm of al-Qaeda.

The report said that Prince Bandar, who was the Saudi ambassador to the United States when the U.S. was attacked on Sept. 11, 2001, is organizing the terrorists through Jordan and Lebanon. "Thanks to funding from the General Intelligence Department

[of Jordan] and support from the Saudi Intelligence in Lebanon, al-Nusra was able to swiftly arm its forces, and make the Syrian regime suffer painful blows through its expertise in Iraqi bombings," the Intelligence Online report noted.

Bandar bin Sultan, who is chief British meddler Tony Blair's partner in crime, was named director of Saudi intelligence on July 19, 2012, as the Syrian crisis was escalating. From that post he acted not only to strengthen the arming of the terrorists against Syria's al-Assad regime, but also to bring to the fore an anti-Assad, Saudi-run administration in Lebanon, bordering Syria. The objective is to push more arms and terrorists into Syria.

Qualified Washington sources have confirmed to *EIR* the report of Bandar's role in backing the terrorists.

—*Ramtanu Maitra*