

Empire's War Drive Is Hurtling Ahead

by Jeffrey Steinberg

March 18—Over the past week, the potential for a blunder into general war has increased dramatically on several fronts, including in Syria, North Korea, and Iran.

With the Syrian situation deadlocked after two years of foreign-funded efforts to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad, Great Britain and France have called for the European Union to end the arms embargo that has blocked lethal aid from going to the Syrian rebels. According to British news leaks, London has already broken the embargo with a covert shipment of an estimated \$25 million in weapons to the Syrian armed opposition.

French President François Hollande joined British Prime Minister David Cameron at a March 14-15 EU heads of state meeting to press for an end to the arms embargo; however, under strenuous objection from Germany and Austria, the matter was postponed until this week, when a foreign ministers meeting is scheduled to take place in Ireland. The Obama Administration, under intense pushback from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and U.S. diplomats, has so far refused to jump on the bandwagon for lethal aid. However, Secretary of State John Kerry recently announced that the U.S. would provide \$60 million in non-lethal aid to the rebels.

A Bankrupt Policy

The story behind this new aid package is indicative of just how far gone the U.S. and European policy is towards Syria. The U.S. aid is intended to back secular factions of the Syrian opposition, who have lost out to the Saudi-funded radical jihadists, such as the al-Nusra Front, a Syrian branch of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which has been the best-armed, best-trained, and most effective element within the armed Syrian opposition. Large portions of northern Syria have fallen under the control of al-Nusra and allied groups, which have proclaimed an Islamic Emirate of Syria.

Washington is engaged in a losing effort to control

the Syrian opposition, while attempting to avoid a head-on conflict with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf Sunni states that are backing radical Islamists who, for the most part, hate the West as much as they hate the Alawite Assad regime.

The clearest indication of the total bankruptcy of the U.S. Syria policy was a report in the March 16 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, revealing that the CIA's Counterterrorism Center has reassigned a number of analysts to assemble "target folders" on Syrian rebel terrorists, who may be future targets of American drone assassinations. In effect, the Obama Administration has admitted that they have thoroughly lost control over the anti-Assad insurgency, and that the rebels may be more of a threat to American interests and regional stability than a weakened Assad government in Damascus.

The Russian government has stepped up criticism of the Obama policy of arming Islamist terrorists against the Assad regime, and matched its escalating criticisms with military deployments. The Russian Navy has been retooled to establish a permanent presence in the Mediterranean Sea, the first since the fall of the Soviet Union. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made clear that Russia will maintain its presence in the Mediterranean. And in a further indication of Russian perception of the growing war danger, the Council of the Russian Ministry of Defense met in February, and announced a top-to-bottom overhaul of the military, reversing severe personnel and budget cuts that had been pushed by the previous Defense Minister, who was fired last November. Russia is not only accelerating modernization of its strategic nuclear arsenal. It is restoring officer training academies that had been recently shuttered, and taking other war preparation/war avoidance measures.

The Pacific Theater

The Obama Administration is also escalating its military operations in the Asia-Pacific theater, ostensibly in response to North Korea's recent missile launch, nuclear bomb test, and threats to directly attack the United States in retaliation for recent UN Security Council sanctions. According to senior U.S. intelligence sources, the Obama Administration is pressing Japan to build up new ABM radar installations, and is considering deploying tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea as a deterrent against D.P.R.K. threats. South Korean government officials indicated that they



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are less concerned about a North Korean nuclear attack than they are about a massive conventional provocation across the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea).

U.S. officials candidly admit that they do not have a clear profile of the Pyongyang leadership, and are uncertain whether the recent North Korean provocative actions are intended as a prelude to direct negotiations, or an actual threat of war on the peninsula.

American actions are driving the crisis towards a potential military confrontation. James Miller, Assistant Secretary of Defense told a recent Washington gathering that the U.S. is pressing Japan to accelerate the deployment of new radar systems as part of an ABM system, to protect both Japan and the United States against a North Korean missile launch. The U.S. drive escalated further when North Korea fired short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan at the start of annual U.S.-South Korean large-scale military maneuvers last week.

The Iran Wild Card

On March 12, the Director of National Intelligence, Gen. James Clapper, told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Iran has *not* commenced work on a nuclear

weapon, despite advances in its nuclear enrichment program. Clapper, in effect, threw cold water on Israeli claims that Iran could build its first nuclear weapon in a matter of months. President Obama, who will make his first Presidential visit to Israel at the end of this week, gave interviews to Israeli news organizations, in which he said Iran was one year away from a nuclear weapon, and reiterated that U.S. policy is to use all means necessary to block Iran from obtaining such a weapon.

Although Obama's policy is different than that of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Obama emphasis on threats, sanctions, and ultimatums is hardly conducive to negotiated settlement. The Obama policy is a direct continuation of the Bush-Cheney

policy: Isolate, sanction, and pressure Iran into surrendering its nuclear capabilities. Although recent meetings between the Iranian government and the P5+1 (UN Security Council Permanent Five plus Germany) were universally described as positive, Obama's behavior during his upcoming visit to Israel could be a spoiler, driving Iran from the negotiating table at a crucial moment.

Iran is also going into presidential elections in June, and the period of the next three months is certain to be consumed by Iranian political infighting and possible mass protests.

The strategic panorama is littered with regional wars, instabilities, and provocations that could easily spill over into general war—precisely the outcome that LaRouche and the war avoidance factions in the U.S. institutions are trying to avoid. On March 12, at the inauguration of a new Washington think tank, the Center on Global Interests, former U.S. Ambassador Richard Burt warned that the U.S. had to repair the damaged relations with Moscow, to avoid a slide to war, and urged that Washington and Moscow reach an agreement on the BMD deployments in Europe, by returning to the initial NATO-Russia plan for a joint program.