

ISRAEL STRIKES SYRIA

Superpowers Make 11th-Hour Effort To Avoid Global War

by Jeffrey Steinberg

May 12—When Israeli airstrikes against Syria one week ago brought the Middle East, and the world as a whole, to the very edge of war, high-level circles in Russia, the United States, and China intervened at the 11th hour to prevent an eruption of a general conflict. The clearest indication of this war-avoidance effort was the May 7 Moscow meeting of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Following a three-hour, closed-door discussion, Kerry and Lavrov announced that the U.S. and Russia will convene a conference before the end of May, to bring together the Syrian government and the opposition to negotiate a ceasefire and succession plan based on the June 2012 Geneva framework. That framework was signed by the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, Turkey, Qatar, and other nations with the intention of bringing the two-year conflict to a peaceful conclusion. However, in the intervening year, zero progress was made, as the U.S., U.K., France, Turkey, and Qatar continued to press for regime change, and provided arms and other material support to the rebels, in their effort to bring down the Bashar Assad government.

Recent events, led by the pair of Israeli bombing raids on Syrian government targets, brought the situation to the very edge of a conflict that was sure to spill over into neighboring countries, and would ultimately draw in the three superpowers—the U.S., Russia, and China. Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is scheduled to visit Moscow in

mid-June, became a target of venomous attack by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and others who insist that the United States should intervene militarily to overthrow Assad, through the establishment of a no-fly zone, a liberated area, and other measures. Dempsey has repeatedly told President Obama and his national security team that there are no viable military options, and that the U.S. cannot replay the Libya War of 2011 on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean.

Dempsey's outspoken opposition to any U.S. military action was strongly supported today by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Appearing on CBS's *Face the Nation*, Gates said that the so-called "Arab Spring" needed to be re-assessed; that the countries going through this revolutionary process are artificial creations of the European colonial powers who created synthetic countries, divided internally along ethnic, religious, and tribal lines. He reminded viewers that in the past 250 years, the American Revolution was the only successful revolution. He recalled his strong opposition to the no-fly zone in Libya, a dispute with the White House that led to his early resignation in June 2011. He made an even stronger case against any such no-fly zone in Syria, adding that during the time that he was Secretary of Defense, the United States carried out two regime-change invasions, both of which bogged it down in a decade of war.

Kerry's Shift to War-Avoidance

Lyndon LaRouche took careful note of the Kerry meeting in Moscow, as a crucial push-back against the



State Department

Secretary of State Kerry's trip to Moscow, where he met with Russian President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov, furthered the prospects for a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. Kerry and Lavrov are shown here, at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, on May 7.

momentum towards general war. He observed that Obama is “going down,” and that Kerry is enough of an opportunist to recognize that fact and move into the war-avoidance camp. Indeed, in Moscow, Kerry made a strong case for a strategic partnership between Russia and the United States—like the World War II alliance that saved the world from fascism. He emphasized the grave danger of war, and made clear that Washington and Moscow would work in partnership to bring the warring parties to the table to end the Syria crisis through diplomacy, not war.

Not everyone was pleased with the outcome of the Moscow meeting. British Prime Minister David Cameron raced off to Moscow, and then on to Washington, to insert Britain in the middle of the plans for the new Geneva meeting, unquestionably to sabotage it before it takes place. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan also jumped into the fray, continuing to assert the now widely discredited claims that the Assad government had used chemical weapons against the Syrian people.

Even after UN investigator Judge Carla Del Ponte told the Swiss and British media that preliminary UN findings indicated that the Syrian rebels, and *not* the Syrian Army, had used sarin gas, Erdogan continued to press the lie that Assad had crossed President Obama's “red line” on the use of chemical weapons. Even as the charge that Assad has used chemical weapons was discredited, Erdogan continued to stoke the fires against the

Syrian government, blaming a May 11 terror attack in southern Turkey on Syria, despite the fact that the only parties arrested were Turkish nationals.

The Turkish prime minister is to meet with President Obama in Washington on May 16, and he, too, will undoubtedly press for a U.S. military intervention, and seek to sabotage the joint Russian-American peace effort.

While Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu insisted that the Israeli missile strikes on targets inside Syria were aimed only at Hezbollah, and were not part of an Israeli intervention on behalf of Syrian rebels, the fact remains that Israel is a wildcard factor in the greater Middle East conflict, and any further Israeli strikes on Syria or Lebanon could be the trigger for all-out war.

War Avoidance Means Dump Obama

In recent weeks, Syrian Army forces have taken back control of crucial choke-point transit corridors, leading to the Lebanese and Jordanian borders. The Syrian rebels have been stymied in the recent period, and following the Kerry trip to Moscow, a number of Syrian rebel leaders denounced the United States for “selling out” their cause, accusing the U.S. of withholding weapons and ammunition from the rebels, thus allowing the Syrian Army to win several battles for strategic territory.

The fact is that the rebels cannot defeat the Syrian Army at this time, and the tide of battle has turned for the time being. Frantic calls for outside military intervention from the likes of Senators McCain and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), and other American hawks, have not swayed the Joint Chiefs. And McCain's repeated and pointed attacks on Dempsey, accusing him of misrepresenting the Syrian military capacities because he “does not want to fight,” are only likely to harden the resolve of the military and other anti-war forces to hold their ground. The Gates intervention today is a good example of the intensity of the fight now underway.

With Cameron and Erdogan in Washington this week, the danger is that Obama will ignore the sage advice of his generals and go with the British Crown's war plans. Between Obama and Netanyahu, the war danger remains great. As LaRouche has emphasized, the only ultimately reliable war prevention policy is Obama's removal from office.