

Russian Spokesmen See Threat of Nuclear War

Sergei Markov, a public policy expert with close ties to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, said the Kremlin sees the U.S./NATO goal of overthrowing Syrian President Hafez al-Assad as a first step to war against Iran, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported on **Feb. 13**. “We’ve been deceived over and over again,” Markov said. “We consider the claims that Assad is massacring people are falsifications, basically a pretext to introduce troops and start a war there. We saw the U.S. invade Iraq on false pretenses. Then they lied about the humanitarian situation in Libya, and per-

suaed Russia to allow a UN resolution on a no-fly zone to protect civilians. Why should we believe them now? [Russia thinks] the purpose of the West is not peace but war in Syria. They have their own goals which they are cynically pursuing.”

Gen. Nikolai Makarov, Russia’s Chief of the General Staff, told reporters on **Feb. 14** that an attack from the West against Iran could take place as early as this Summer. The RIA News Agency said that Makarov “expects Iran’s enemies to decide in the next few months how to deal with a nuclear program that the United States and Israel have said they might attack.”

“Iran, of course, is a sore spot,” Makarov said. “. . . There has to be some kind of decision about it now. It will be made, probably, closer to Summer.”

He also spoke, according to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, against the U.S./NATO forward-basing of missile defense installations in Eastern Europe, which the U.S. claims is to counter potential missile threats from Iran. “By 2018,” Xinhua reported, “an entirely different generation of those missiles would be ‘capable of shooting down strategic missiles over our territory,’ Makarov said.”

Russia’s highest military official also warned of the prospect of the United States deploying warships in the Black Sea or in the Arctic. “In a case where [Aegis anti-missile system-equipped] ships appear in the Barents Sea, or in the Black Sea, for instance, we will likely take special measures in the frame of the state rearmament program,” Makarov told reporters. “But we would not like to use these measures, as they increase the financial burden for us.”

On **Feb. 15**, **General Makarov** told the Russian Public Chamber that “the possibility of local armed conflicts virtually along the entire perimeter of [Russia’s] border has grown dramatically. I cannot rule out that, in certain circumstances, local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with nuclear weapons.”

Russia Today news service quoted him saying that “almost all countries formerly belonging to the Warsaw Pact have become NATO members, and the Baltic States that were earlier a part of the U.S.S.R. have also joined the alliance.”

The online news service noted an earlier statement by **Prime Minister Putin**, that “at time of the withdrawal from Eastern Europe, the NATO Secretary General promised the U.S.S.R. it could be confident that

NATO would not expand beyond its current boundaries. So where is it now? I asked them [the NATO officials]. They have nothing to say. They deceived us in the rudest way.”

Then on **Feb. 16**, radio Ekho Moskvyy interviewed **General Makarov**, who warned that Russia has the right to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty is threatened.

Expanding on a theme he had developed in November of last year, when he warned of the danger of nuclear war, Makarov said: “We are certainly not planning to fight against the whole of NATO, but if there is a threat to the integrity of the Russian Federation, we have the right to use nuclear weapons, and we will.”

The general said that Russia’s nuclear deterrent is the cornerstone of strategic stability, and serious efforts are being taken by the Russian government to modernize the country’s nuclear triad. These include adding ten Borey-class strategic nuclear submarines, bringing its Tu-160 Blackjack and Tu-95 Bear strategic bombers up to date, and adding Yars mobile ballistic missile systems.

Makarov stressed that the country should also maintain efficient conventional forces: “Unfortunately, we are facing threats from a number of unstable states, where no nuclear weapons, but well-trained, strong, and mobile armed forces are required to resolve any conflict situation.”

On **Feb. 16**, Russian Security Council head **Nikolai Patrushev** was quoted by the daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, citing comments made this week at a hearing by Gen. James Clapper, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, about Russia’s nuclear arsenal. Patrushev said that Russia has no intention of attacking the NATO alliance or any other countries.

But, he added, “our Army must fulfill its deterrent function and maintain the country’s sovereignty and peaceful life. And if the United States ignores our proposals regarding a missile defense system in Europe, we will be forced to prepare an asymmetric response. That global system is clearly aimed at Russia. And at China. Earlier the irritant was Moscow. Now it’s Beijing, although the theme of the break-up of Russia is still a current one for them. In certain circles, they sleep and dream about how to get the resources of Siberia and the Far East. And gain access to the Caspian and to the transportation corridor of Central Asia.”