

THE SYRIA FLASHPOINT

Putin Draws the Line Against Empire's Nuclear War Drive

by Nancy Spannaus

June 12—From the moment the British, Obama, and Sarkozy murdered Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi last October, the Putin leadership of Russia has been on to the British Empire's game: a confrontation to break Russia's and China's defense of national sovereignty, with the threat of launching thermonuclear war. That imperial strategy is continuing, with an almost daily escalation against Syria, with the aim of forcing Russian (and Chinese) capitulation to the Empire's drive for global dictatorship.

Fortunately for humanity, the Russian leadership has drawn the line, and refused to back down. It has received crucial support from the highest levels of the U.S. military, in an ongoing battle against the British-controlled grouping in the Obama Administration, led by Obama himself. But the Empire, desperate to hang onto power under threat of its own bankruptcy-disintegration, cannot, by its very nature, give up. Mankind continues to live on the edge of thermonuclear war.

With this reality in mind, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, over the past week, has announced new strategic initiatives against the British drive to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, including a proposal for an international conference including all Syria's neighbors, and, most importantly, exposing the fact that it is the Washington-, London-, and Saudi-supported "opposition" that is behind the massacres which are being used to justify a "humanitarian" war of aggression against Syria.

Lavrov Delivers a Message

Lavrov held a televised press conference in Moscow on June 9 to reiterate an unambiguous message: It is those who want UN and Arab League envoy Kofi Annan's ceasefire plan to fail who are behind the escalating violence in Syria, but it will not work. Russia will never accede to demands for UN-sanctioned armed intervention against Syria, he said.

Russia is "concerned with the reaction on behalf of outside players that openly support armed groups in Syria, but on the other hand, demand decisive steps by the international community to change the regime," Lavrov said. He added that the turmoil in Syria is happening because "players from outside the region are pushing the opposition to defy efforts at compromise." He reiterated the Putin government's steadfast position that Russia "shall not sanction in the UN Security Council the use of force. The consequences for the Middle East would be dire."

Noting the calls to blame every act of violence on the regime, Lavrov said, "The problem is not just the regime." The Houla and Qubeir massacres, terrorist attacks, and other acts of violence "are the result of confrontation fueled by outside forces."

On the Annan plan, Lavrov said that there is "no alternative to implementation for a peaceful settlement." The Western policy of regime change, he said, means more violence. "The Annan plan makes peace possible," but it doesn't "fit into the logic of the West, which



Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (right) with UN and Arab League envoy for the Syrian crisis Kofi Annan, in Cairo on March 10, 2012. Lavrov is reiterating at every possible forum that Russian will not tolerate foreign military intervention in Syria.

wants the international community to sanction intervention.”

To implement the Annan plan, as well as relevant UN Security Council resolutions, Lavrov put forward the Russian proposal, first mooted June 8, for an international conference on Syria, to include the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the U.S., Russia, China, the U.K., and France), Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, and Iraq, as well as the Arab League in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, and also the European Union. “We want this conference to be a venue for frank and open dialogue that would make it clear whether it’s realistic to find agreement on coordinated, targeted actions between the government and all groups of opposition, and the sooner the better,” he said.

While there have been squawks about Russia wanting to include Iran, a close ally of Syria, in the talks, the concept has not been rejected.

Broader War Avoidance

Lavrov’s high-profile intervention should be seen in the context of a larger swath of war avoidance efforts by the Russians, which has been ongoing since last Fall,

and was punctuated in a May 17 speech by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev at the St. Petersburg International Legal Forum, where he reiterated Russia’s unmovable commitment to the principles of international law, the central role of the United Nations, and the inviolability of national sovereignty. The alternative, he said, to the shock of many, was nuclear war:

“Such actions, which undermine state sovereignty, can easily lead to full-scale regional wars even—I am not trying to scare anyone here—with the use of nuclear weapons.”

Under pressure on numerous fronts in addition to Syria—including the NATO anti-missile defense system in Europe, and the threats of a bombing campaign against Iran—the Putin-Medvedev government has taken a series of military preparatory actions. One of those was the deployment of the Russian Navy in the eastern Mediterranean, off the coast of Syria—a deployment Ria Novosti said would be permanent. Another measure is the build-up of military facilities for possible counterstrikes against the NATO ballistic-missile defense systems (BMDS) to be deployed in Romania and Poland.

At the same time, Russia has taken extraordinary diplomatic initiatives to try to ensure war avoidance, including hosting talks with the Syrian opposition, and offering Moscow as a venue for the next round of talks between the UN Permanent Five plus Germany (P5+1) and Iran (June 23). On June 13, Lavrov will travel to Tehran to hold preparatory talks with the Iranian government, prior to those crucial discussions.

The Truth Behind the Massacres

One of the major tools of the Empire faction’s push for war against Syria is the series of massacres being touted as the work of the Assad regime. Yet, as Russian media has consistently reported—and is now being picked up by others as well—these stories are *lies*, concocted, as Lavrov has charged, in order to justify foreign intervention.

EIR exposed the lies behind the Houla massacre in our last issue. On June 7, the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) ran its own story, based on eyewitness reports, which established that those killed

in Houla were slaughtered in cold blood by Syrian rebels, who then video-recorded the results, and falsely portrayed the victims as victims of pro-Assad militias.

Author Rainer Hermann wrote that the Houla massacre occurred after Friday prayers on May 25, when Sunni rebels attacked the three Syrian Army roadblocks around Houla, whose purpose was to protect the Alawite towns near the overwhelmingly Sunni Houla from attack. (President Assad and his family are Alawites, a branch of Shi'a Islam; the Alawites constitute 11-12% of the Syrian population.)

Units of the Syrian Army reinforced the roadblocks that were under attack, and 90 minutes of fighting ensued, killing dozens of soldiers and rebels. During the fighting, Houla was cordoned off from the outside world.

“According to eyewitness accounts,” the FAZ report continued, “the massacre occurred during this time. Those killed were almost exclusively families belonging to Houla’s Alawi and Shi’a minorities. Over 90% of Houla’s population are Sunnis. Several dozen members of a family which had converted from Sunni to Shi’a Islam were slaughtered. Members of the Shomaliya, an Alawite family, were also killed, as was the family of a Sunni member of the Syrian Parliament, because he was regarded as a collaborator. Immediately after the massacre, the perpetrators filmed their victims, and then presented them as Sunni victims in videos posted on the Internet.”

This FAZ account is the most prominent of several stories that have come out quoting eyewitnesses who are naming the Syrian rebels as the culprits in the attacks. On June 10, the British *Mail Online* published an account reporting that “a group of Western women in Damascus has contacted the *Mail on Sunday* [June 10] to say rebels were firing upon the army with the sole purpose of inciting riot and mayhem.

“They mention a peaceful march in which a rebel pulled out a gun and shot dead an unarmed policeman. The following riot was reported as a police attack on peaceful protesters, they say.”

The author, Peter McKay, wrote that he has not been able to verify the report, but this is not the only instance of similar reporting. He also wrote that Britain’s “Chan-



UN Photo/Jenny Rockett

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice is demanding foreign intervention in Syria, even outside the venue of the UN, if Russia and China veto such a move on the Security Council (which they would do).

nel 4’s chief correspondent, Alex Thomson, says Syrian rebels tried to have him and his team killed by Assad forces by leading them into a firefight,” because “‘Dead journalists are bad for Damascus.’”

A third story about the Houla massacre in a Dutch Internet publication, *dereactie.be*, by Dutch Middle East expert Martin Janssen, also quotes witnesses to opposition atrocities carried out in Syria.

The Empire Presses On

Meanwhile, the Empire faction—from British Foreign Secretary William Hague, to Obama’s Oxford-trained UN Ambassador Susan Rice, and academics such as Ann-Marie Slaughter of Princeton—is loudly demanding foreign intervention, even outside the venue of the United Nations. Rice delivered this threat at the UN on May 31; on June 10, she was echoed by Slaughter in an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, invoking former British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s doctrine of “humanitarian intervention.” She said that “the world will act—with force if necessary and with the approval only of a regional organization and a majority of the members of the UN Security Council.”

The lesson of those statements is clear: Americans must utilize the political space given them by the Russian resistance, to remove Obama from office. Otherwise, the threat of imminent war remains.