

Obama, Brits Escalate Confrontation with Russia

by Jeffrey Steinberg

June 19—Russian President Vladimir Putin firmly stood his ground this week, during the G-20 summit meeting in Los Cabos, Mexico, notably during his tense two-hour meeting with President Barack Obama. After having cancelled his attendance at the G-8 summit meeting at Camp David last month, in a clear rebuff to NATO and the United States, President Putin refused to make any concessions on the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and forced an intimidated President Obama to sign a joint statement, reiterating the two countries' support for the UN-Annan mission.

Sources close to the Obama Administration reported that the U.S. President went into the nearly two-hour session with his Russian counterpart already shaken by Russia's repeated warnings that the U.S. and NATO policies of selective regime change, under the pretext of "humanitarian interventionism," and their unilateral plans to deploy a missile defense shield along Russia's southern and western borders, could wreck the global order, centered on the United Nations Charter and the central role of the UN Security Council—and lead to thermonuclear war.

According to these accounts, nearly a third of the bilateral Putin-Obama meeting focused on Syria. Putin repeatedly challenged Obama to tell him what Syria would look like if Assad were removed from power. Did the United States have a plan of action to stabilize the country? What about the Syrian people? What about

the military and law enforcement agencies? What about the economy?

Putin drilled home the point that the two most recent instances of U.S.-backed foreign military intervention for regime change—the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, and the 2011 overthrow and extrajudicial killing of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi—had not exactly brought stability to either country.

P5+1 in Moscow

As President Putin was making the rounds in Mexico, holding a series of bilateral talks and participating in the main G-20 sessions, top Russian officials were hosting the third round of P5+1 (UN Security Council Permanent Five plus German) talks in Moscow, aimed at reaching an agreement with Iran on its peaceful development of nuclear power, while assuring that they will never develop nuclear weapons. Those talks were no less difficult than the G-20 brawl in Los Cabos, given that the P5+1 countries and Iran came into the Moscow talks with radically different proposals, and that the Iranian situation was further complicated by the eruption of renewed faction fighting in Tehran among the three contending groups which share power at the top of the Islamic Republic.

At the end of the day, the P5+1 talks concluded with no agreement, but a plan to continue the talks at the "experts" level in Istanbul on July 3 was finalized. For now,



Russian Presidential Press and Information Office

Presidents Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama both look to the horizon in this photo-op from the G-20 Summit. As reports show, their visions of the future clash.

the diplomatic process—pivoted on war avoidance—is continuing.

According to Russian and American sources, it was the Russian diplomacy with the Iranian negotiators that prevented a total breakdown of the talks, a breakdown that would have been quietly celebrated in London and Tel Aviv, because it would have re-started the countdown for war in the Persian Gulf.

Provoking Russia

In the run-up to the Los Cabos and Moscow meetings, the Obama Administration and the British have engaged in a series of provocations, all aimed at getting Russia to make concessions on the Syria regime-change issue. For weeks, a constant stream of disinformation has been put out through the English-language press, accusing Russia of violating a United Nations arms embargo on Syria, etc.

When a barrage of news stories and government statements alleged that Russia had sold a quantity of new anti-personnel weapons to Syria, including attack helicopters, Russia responded that it had contracted to do repairs and upgrades on helicopters that had been sold to Syria many years ago.

On the very day that Putin and Obama were meeting in Mexico, the British government cancelled the insurance policy on a Russian ship that was then in the process of delivering the repaired helicopters to Syria. As

the result of the insurance cancellation, the ship is now reportedly returning to its Russian port.

Sources close to the Obama Administration report that the cancellation of the British insurance was initiated by Michael McFaul, the current Obama Ambassador to Russia, and a loud critic of Putin. At McFaul's recommendation, President Obama contacted British Prime Minister David Cameron and the insurance was lifted. Reportedly, this action was taken behind the back of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and she was furious at the maneuver.

Regime Change by Civil War

Despite Obama's backdown during his Mexico meeting with Putin, the on-the-ground situation in

Syria continues to deteriorate, as the result of a concerted commitment by Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey to flood the country with illegal arms and paid foreign mercenaries. The strategy was recently described by one former top U.S. diplomat to the region as "regime change by civil war."

According to senior U.S. intelligence sources, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been pouring millions of dollars into providing mercenaries and weapons to the rebels. The flood of illegal arms across the borders from Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey into Syria has been the principal source of the continuing escalating violence.

The British strategy is to foment sectarian, religious, ethnic, and tribal violence in Syria, to the point that a prolonged civil war is unleashed, like the Balkan wars of the 1990s, and the earlier Lebanese civil war from 1975-1990. In an update of the 20th-Century Sykes-Picot scheme between the British and French colonial powers, London is now out to provoke a Hundred Years War within the Islamic world, pitting Sunni versus Shi'ites, and Persians versus Arabs.

The kind of mayhem which the British envision is presaged in the eyewitness report from Christians in Syria, which we include below. However, long before that logic of war plays out, it is much more likely that the Empire will risk thermonuclear confrontation, and we *all* will lose. That is, unless we take action to disempower the Empire and Obama, now.