

War Avoidance Efforts Grow; But Brits Push Conflict

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Jan. 20—A highly placed U.S. intelligence official has emphasized in discussions over the past 24 hours that the U.S. military, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, has gone to extraordinary lengths to avoid the eruption of a global war over the Strait of Hormuz. Despite months of British and Israeli war propaganda about Iran's imminent nuclear weapon breakout, it is no longer credible to claim that Iran is months away from producing a nuclear bomb. So now, London and its Israeli satrapy have shifted their focus to provoking a military incident in the Strait of Hormuz, between the U.S. Navy and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

According to the source, the Pentagon has ordered all U.S. naval assets in the region to pull back from chokepoints where any kind of incident at sea might occur. While there is a tremendous buildup of U.S. carrier-centered naval forces in the area, those forces have been largely pulled back into the Arabian Sea, where the danger of a brush-fire incident with IRGC speed boats is at a minimum. U.S. Navy ship commanders have been told that the standing authorization to fire on menacing vessels within a certain range is frozen, to further minimize the risk that a minor incident might flare up into a larger war.

The great fear, the source said, is that Israel will stage either a full-scale attack on Iran's nuclear facilities at Natanz and/or Bushehr, or a more limited sabo-

tage incident, aimed at blocking any talks between Washington and Tehran on the range of security issues. The source stated that the U.S. is *already* engaged in the preliminary phases of direct talks with Iran, through three channels, including Turkey and the Swiss ambassador, that reach directly to the Supreme Leader (and ultimate decision-maker) Ayatollah Khamenei. It is expected, barring some major sabotage, that the talks will begin in Turkey in mid-February or soon after, under the UN Security Council P5+1 framework.

No U.S. Role in Roshan Killing

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Panetta both responded forcefully and immediately, after the assassination of Iranian scientist Mostafa Roshan, denying any American involvement. It was believed that the assassination was directly aimed at blocking the talks from going forward. The cancellation of the joint U.S.-Israeli "Austere Challenge" missile defense maneuvers, scheduled for April, was a direct U.S. retaliation for the assassination.

The greatest fear, according to the intelligence source, and a second source involved with the U.S. Central Command (Centcom), is that Israel will launch an attack on Iran following a minor incident at sea involving the IRGC and U.S. Navy. Such an attack would



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Defense Secretary Panetta and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, joined by Hillary Clinton's State Department, are fully committed to avoiding the outbreak of war over the Strait of Hormuz. Shown: Navy personnel man a machine gun aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey, as it transits through the Strait of Hormuz, November 2011.

force the United States into an all-out war with Iran, and the consequences could be global war, including thermonuclear war. Gen. Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is in Israel today, delivering the toughest warning ever to Israel against any action against Iran.

The intelligence source concluded by emphasizing that “the fact that the war avoidance has succeeded over the past 45 days is a monumental achievement. But,” he added, “this was a very, very short-term success, and the challenges will continue.” He explained that the United States is taking a risk, attempting to resume direct negotiations with Iran (via the P5+1), while also proceeding with very strong sanctions. He added that, based on the past five years’ experience with the Iranians, it is believed that pressure must be applied to get Khamenei to reach a final agreement and abide by it.

At the same time, such harsh sanctions drive the situation towards confrontation. “It is a very delicate balance,” the source admitted. He noted that, between the radical elements within the Revolutionary Guard

and British control over the Netanyahu government in Israel and Obama in the United States, the British believe, for the moment, that the momentum is towards war. Therefore, they do not have to overplay their hand. If the prospects of a peace deal with Iran improve, then the British will intervene, using every tool at their disposal, to sabotage the process.

Lyndon LaRouche commented on the source’s evaluation: The British will never cooperate on any peace deal. The only option is to defeat the British, and that is where we must continue to build up the clout to block the war drive. This makes it all the more obvious why Obama has to be removed from office. LaRouche added that the United States and Russia, working in cooperation, can strike a deal with

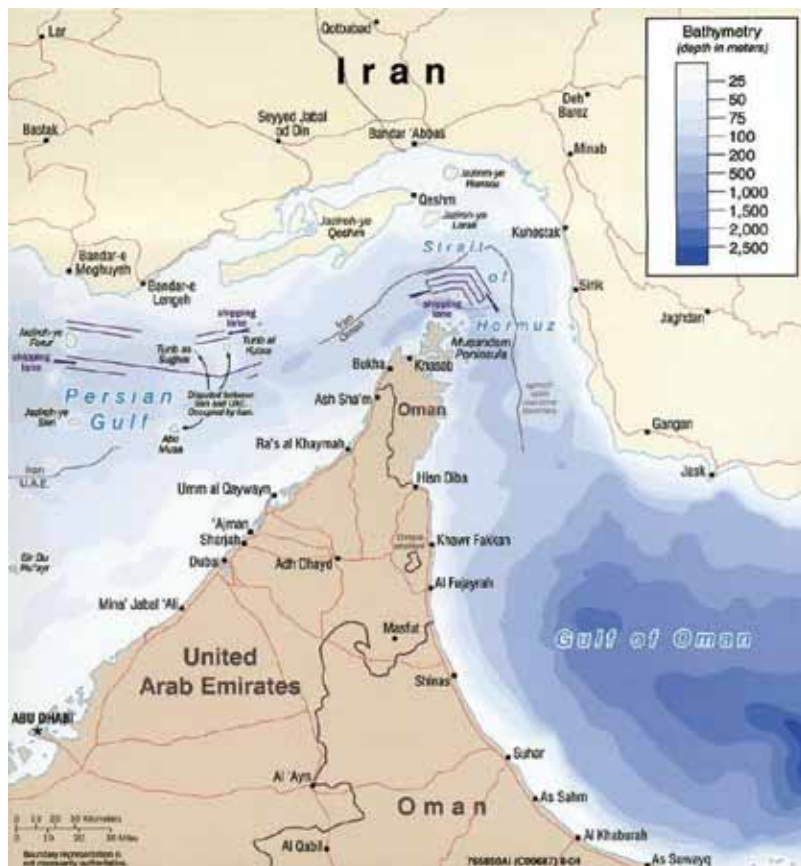
Iran that would benefit all parties.

Russia Weighs In

At a widely publicized news conference on Jan. 18, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made clear that Russia will never again allow the UN Security Council to be whipsawed into giving support to a NATO regime-change war, as happened in Libya. Summarizing the major foreign policy events of 2011, Lavrov said that 2012 would see the continuation of the “Arab Awakening,” and related events pose serious challenges. He warned against international powers meddling in the internal affairs of sovereign nations. “Nations should be free to choose what path of development they wish to follow and the international community should accept their choice. Foreign countries should refrain from interfering, let alone the use of force. What is happening in one country has nothing to do with what goes on in others. Other countries should focus on their own business and abide by the principle of ‘Do No Harm.’”

A repetition of the Libya scenario has to be avoided

FIGURE 1
The Strait of Hormuz



at all costs, Lavrov cautioned. Unfortunately, some Western countries attempted to pursue a similar scenario by offering their so-called assistance for resolving the crisis in Syria, he said. He made clear that Russia intends to obstruct a UN Security Council resolution on military intervention for Syria. Moscow has proposed a draft resolution which stipulates non-interference and non-use of force, and China supported this wording, Lavrov said. As for the Western partners, they disagree on these two points, and this cannot but cause concern.

On the issue of Iran, Lavrov was explicit:

“New unilateral sanctions against Iran are designed to stifle the Iranian economy and sow discontent among the Iranian people. Russia is confident that the chances for the talks between the six mediator countries and Iran to resume are quite good.”

Even though Tehran is not easy to deal with, it is willing to embark on a dialogue with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and to allow inspections

of its nuclear facilities. But the West itself isn’t always helpful at promoting such a dialogue. For example, the U.S. and Iran have had no diplomatic relations for 30 years, as Washington continues to insist that Iran is posing a major threat to global security.

Lavrov also was adamant that Russia will use all the resources at its disposal, including its nuclear capabilities, to thwart any efforts to alter the nuclear balance in Eurasia. Referring to the Obama Administration’s abrupt shut-off of long-running negotiations with Russia on joint deployment of a missile defense shield for Europe’s southern tier, he told journalists: “The logic behind Russia’s stance is crystal clear. Russia will respond in an appropriate way if someone dares to deploy weapons which pose a threat to its national security near its borders. As for our U.S. partners, their motives are hard to grasp. On the one hand, they are saying that their missile defense plans are not aimed at breaking the nuclear balance. They argue that the missile defense shield is needed to guarantee them protection against missiles which could appear in countries outside Europe. On the other hand, they reject our offer to create a joint missile defense system which would pursue these very purposes.”

Looking to the P5+1

The timing of Lavrov’s annual review was noteworthy. The very next day, he met with Ali Baqeri, the deputy secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, to discuss the Russian and Iranian positions going into the anticipated P5+1 talks, expected to resume within a month in Turkey. The Iranian Supreme National Security Council reports directly to Khamenei and will be the deliberative body through which Iran will decide how to handle the P5+1 negotiations. Immediately after his consultations in Moscow, Baqeri flew to Beijing for similar consultations with the Chinese leadership.

According to a senior U.S. intelligence source familiar with the Russia-Iran talks, the Russians made several points clear to the visitor from Tehran. First, Russia is adamantly opposed to any military action against Iran,



CCTV News

At a Jan. 18 news conference, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov strongly defended the principle of national sovereignty: "Foreign countries should refrain from interfering, let alone the use of force.... Other countries should ... abide by the principle of 'Do No Harm.'"

and will veto any Security Council resolution aimed at giving authorization for any kind of military action. Second, however, Russia is equally opposed to Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. Russia will fully support Iran's development of nuclear power, but shares "80%" of the legitimate American and European concerns about a nuclear arms race in the Persian Gulf. In the talks, according to the source, Lavrov went out of his way to make clear to the Iranians that, under no circumstances was Russia interested in being dragged into a war in the Persian Gulf, and he strongly warned the Iranians against allowing any provocations to trigger such a conflict.

LaRouche expressed confidence that, if the United States and Russia were to work in a coordinated fashion, a viable agreement could be reached. However, with Obama in the White House, any such prospects of cooperative diplomacy were illusive. The deployment of Project Democracy fanatic Michael McFaul to Moscow as the new U.S. ambassador was the latest reminder that Obama is a British pawn, and will do everything possible to sabotage any U.S.-Russia-China war avoidance collaboration. According to sources inside the Obama Administration, McFaul was sent to Moscow with orders to report directly to President Obama, bypassing Secretary of State Clinton, who had successfully cultivated cooperative relations both with Lavrov and with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Strong Russian Warnings

In the absence of this vital Russian-American war avoidance collaboration, Russia has been forced to continue to stress the danger of a thermonuclear showdown in the event of any eruption of conflict in the volatile Persian Gulf or Eastern Mediterranean. Sergei Konovalov, military correspondent of the daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, on Jan. 16, continued his series of articles on Russian military alertness to a threatened U.S. and/or Israeli attack on Iran. In a Dec. 15 article, Konovalov had warned, "One could assume Iran's reaction will not be delayed. A full-scale war is possible, and its consequences could be unpredictable." LaRouche commented on that earlier article, that the psychological warfare aspect of Konovalov's undoubtedly truthful report about Russian military planning should be taken into account, along with its literal implications.

Konovalov's Jan. 16 article likewise has both elements: He writes about "large-scale staff exercises being planned by the Russian General Staff, based on a possible U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran"—which exercises are scheduled for September. At the same time, putting the report out now dramatizes the danger of a global showdown far sooner, especially insofar as Konovalov notes that the Russian Strategic Missile Forces will be involved.

Konovalov reports that the General Staff is preparing the script for the Caucasus-2012 maneuvers, which, he writes, "will differ from last year's exercises in this series, by being larger-scale and more closely approximating actual current military and political conditions." They will be held in southern Russia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia. Konovalov states that the scenario of the exercises will include "a possible war by the U.S.A. and several other countries against Iran, as well as other possible conflicts in the Caspian and Southern Caucasus region."

"We should note," he adds, "that this year, the exercises will be not merely tactical/operational, but strategic in nature." Konovalov explains that that means the participation of staffs from all branches of the Russian armed forces—including the Strategic Missile Corps and Aerospace Defense Forces. Those are the forces that would be engaged in a nuclear war with the United States.