

WAR DANGER GROWS

Obama Goes for Confrontation; Empire Plays 'Korean Roulette'

by Jeffrey Steinberg

April 16—While Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin was urging global cooperation on asteroid defense as a way out of the conflict over the U.S. Eurasian missile-defense policy, the Obama Administration was continuing its push for global confrontation, sinking deeper into a British trap, despite the best of war-avoidance efforts from inside the U.S. defense and security establishment.

The call for President Obama to intensify the confrontation in North Asia, predictably, came from the editors of the British Crown's flagship *Economist* magazine of April 6-12, with a cover image of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un reaching for the nuclear button, and a lead editorial headlined "Korean Roulette." The editors demanded, "Kim Jong Un has raised the stakes; it is time to get tougher with the nastiest regime on the planet... The imperative now is to face down Mr Kim.... Other rogue regimes and would-be nuclear proliferators, such as Iran, need to know that actions have consequences." The editors praised Obama for deploying B-2 bombers capable of carrying nuclear payloads over South Korea, and demanded that China be forced to impose harsher sanctions against the North.

U.S. intelligence sources have confirmed that the United States has quietly put a full nuclear deterrent in place in and around Korea, including the forward deployment of Ohio-class submarines armed with nuclear warheads.

The word from London was echoed on Capitol Hill via a convoluted leak of a segment of a classified De-

fense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessment that North Korea had already developed a crude nuclear warhead for its missiles. On April 11, during a House Armed Services Committee hearing, featuring Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.) quoted from a declassified portion of a DIA memo that read, "DIA assesses with moderate confidence the North currently has nuclear weapons capable of delivery by ballistic missiles, however the reliability will be low." Dempsey chose not to comment, telling the committee that the report had not been made public, and that he had not seen it.

Later that evening, both the Pentagon and the Director of National Intelligence, Gen. James Clapper, disputed the DIA finding. Pentagon spokesman George Little declared, "It would be inaccurate to suggest that the North Korean regime has fully tested, developed, or demonstrated the kinds of nuclear capabilities referenced in the passage. Clapper added, "Moreover, North Korea has not yet demonstrated the full range of capabilities necessary for a nuclear armed missile."

These dramatics were playing out in London and Washington as actual tensions in North Asia were reaching a dangerous level, such that any little incident could trigger an out-of-control conflict. Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Seoul on April 11 for meetings with top R.O.K. officials, including President Park Chung-hee and Foreign Minister Yun Byung-Se. While Kerry declared that the United States preferred a return

to a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, he warned that North Korea would be making a “huge mistake,” if the regime conducted a missile or nuclear bomb test.

Japan compounded the war danger the following day, with the announcement by Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera that the country would permanently deploy Patriot PAC-3 missile defense batteries to Okinawa, well ahead of the scheduled 2014 deployment date.

Upon his arrival in Beijing from Seoul, Kerry played a carrot-and-stick game with the Chinese leadership, by “offering” to scale back U.S. ballistic missile defense deployments into the Asia-Pacific, if China succeeded in getting Pyongyang to dismantle its entire nuclear program.

The new Chinese government of President Xi Jinping has been attempting to cool out the Korean crisis, maintaining regular contact with both the North Korean and American governments. The Chinese delivered a pointed warning to the Obama Administration last week, prior to the Kerry visit, that the U.S. actions were being seen in Pyongyang as war provocations that were likely to trigger an incident, or a possible larger conflict. Hagel announced that the U.S. would delay a scheduled missile defense test, and would reduce the threatening rhetoric, in an effort to create a possible window for a diplomatic walk-back from the brink. Both Beijing and Moscow took positive note of the U.S. gesture.

Making clear that it has no interest in a second Korean war, the official Chinese Communist Party newspaper, *People's Daily*, published an editorial April 11 under the headline “Words to Four Nations.” The editorial urged all parties to step down from the confrontation. The message to Washington was particularly sharp: “Do not add fuel to the flames.... [T]he United States, as a superpower whose comprehensive national and military strength is far stronger than the DPRK's, is in a strong position; therefore, any strong move will only increase tension on the peninsula.”

The editorial also warned Japan, “Do not fish in troubled waters,” and urged the new South Korean government to follow through with campaign pledges to improve relations with the North. Pyongyang was not exempted from criticism, with China warning that “if its choices and words intensify Korean Peninsula tensions and affect peace and stability in the region, they become international issues.”

Western media, led by the *New York Times*, tried to spin the Chinese statements into a break with Pyong-

yang, but behind the scenes, U.S. military and intelligence officials were clear that China was attempting to avoid a major conflict, while defending its longtime ally. Chinese officials, including top Peoples Liberation Army officers, have made clear to visiting American delegations that Beijing will not allow the North Korean regime to collapse.

The Syrian Quagmire

The situation in Southwest Asia has also further disintegrated in the past week. According to senior intelligence officials, the U.S. is being dragged deeper into the military quagmire in Syria. The Obama Administration is reviewing options for more direct military involvement, following a series of high-profile statements from leading Senators, including Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, both demanding more direct U.S. military aid to the rebels, and Levin calling for the establishment of a no-fly zone over northern and southern Syria.

In London for a G-8 foreign ministers meeting on April 10, Kerry and British Foreign Secretary William Hague met with the so-called “prime minister” of the Syrian opposition, Ghassan Hitto. Kerry used the occasion to announce additional “non-lethal” military assistance to the rebels.

Ever since Obama declared in March 2011 that “Assad must go,” Washington has been scrambling for a strategy to put the President's words into action. However, Washington has been literally out-gunned by Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., and Qatar, which have poured massive amounts of money and weapons into the hands of armed Islamist factions of the opposition, who have a commanding position over nominal “secular” opponents of the Assad regime.

On April 9, Bruce Reidel, a retired career CIA officer and national security aide to Obama, warned that the al-Nusra Front, the Syrian arm of al-Qaeda, was by far the most effective fighting force, and would pose serious security problems for key U.S. allies, including Israel and Jordan.

Days later, al-Qaeda in Iraq announced a merger with al-Nusra, establishing an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Reidel revealed that a terrorist offensive had been foiled at the last moment in Jordan in October 2012, just weeks after the Sept. 11, 2012 attack in Benghazi, Libya.