

OBAMA'S ARMING OF SYRIAN REBELS

Military Steps Provoke Russia As U.S. Resistance Grows

by Jeffrey Steinberg

June 24—President Obama, in a desperate drive to save his Presidency and create the conditions for the trans-Atlantic bankers' dictatorship demanded by his British masters, is recklessly moving the world closer to general war. In the past week alone, he announced that the U.S. would provide weapons to the rebels in Syria, and he called for an overhaul of U.S. strategic nuclear policy, which Russian President Vladimir Putin instantly rejected as an attempt to prepare for a first strike on Russia. There is also mounting resistance to Obama's war drive within the top echelons of the U.S. military and within Congress, putting the issue of impeachment on the table.

Meanwhile, Paulo Pinheiro, the head of the UN Human Rights Commission's inquiry into charges of chemical weapons use in Syria (Obama's "red line" for supplying weapons to the rebels), told reporters on June 22, "We are not able to say who has used chemical agents or chemical weapons and we are very worried about the chain of custody of the substances." The Commission's report earlier this month had noted that "allegations have been received concerning the use of chemical weapons by both parties."

At the G8 summit in Northern Ireland on June 17-18, Obama's decision to arm the Syrian rebels made his bilateral meeting with Putin a chilly affair. Both leaders agreed to continue to work together to hold a Geneva II summit seeking a political solution to the Syrian crisis, but acknowledged sharp differences over how to accomplish that vital goal. Putin told Western reporters at the G8: "One does not really need to support the people

who not only kill their enemies, but open up their bodies, eat their intestines in front of the public and cameras. Are these the people you want to support? Are they the ones you want to supply with weapons?"

Putin repeated the attacks on the arming of the rebels during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum two days ago, making it clear that the Russian supply of weapons to the Syrian government was totally in line with international law—given that the Assad government is the legitimate government of a sovereign country—while the arming of the rebels seeking Assad's overthrow is a violation of international law. "It is hard for me to imagine why anyone would supply arms to those armed opposition groups in Syria, whose composition is not fully clear to us," he said. "If the United States and the U.S. Secretary of State recognize one of the key Syrian opposition organizations, Jabhat al-Nusra, as a terrorist group and officially recognize its connections to al-Qaeda, how can they supply arms to that opposition? Where will these arms eventually end up? What will be their role? We still do not have answers to these questions. And when we ask our partners these questions, they also cannot answer."

Opposition in Washington

Obama's escalation against Syria has also caused increased concern among some Members of Congress. On June 20, a bipartisan group of four U.S. Senators—Tom Udall (D-N.M.), Chris Murphy (D-Ct.), Rand Paul (R-Ky.), and Mike Lee (R-Ut.) introduced legislation

prohibiting any U.S. government agency from arming the Syrian rebels. The bill demands that the White House explicitly receive Congressional approval before any support other than humanitarian aid could be provided to the rebels.

In interviews with MSNBC, Udall and Lee yesterday reiterated that the President has no authority to arm the Syrian rebels without first obtaining Congressional approval, under Article I, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution, which gives Congress the sole authority to declare war. The Senate action is parallel to a concurrent resolution, H.C.R.-3, introduced into the House in January 2013 by Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.), under which any President bypassing Congressional authority by going to war without explicit authorization would face impeachment.

During the week-long deliberations on the Syria crisis preceding the announcement of arms supplies, Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reportedly lambasted Secretary of State John Kerry for his proposal to carry out limited bombing of the Syrian Air Force. Dempsey warned that any such actions would draw the U.S. fully into the conflict, with grave strategic consequences.

Dempsey's warnings were echoed in a June 19 op-ed by 22-term Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), published in *USA Today* under the title "Obama's Syria Plan Has Many Dangers." Rangel wrote of his own deep skepticism about Obama's escalation, adding, "As the United States takes on an expanded role in this volatile regional conflict, we should reflect on the lessons we have learned from the past decade of war and carefully consider how and why we wage war." Rangel ended with a call for the United States to reinstate the draft, and a warning that the Obama actions against Syria, if not countered by Congress, would contribute to the "slow erosion of our democratic principles."

Nuclear Weapons Policy

Even as President Obama was moving to illegally draw the United States deeper into the Syrian quagmire, which has spread into neighboring Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan, the President also used the occasion of his visit to Berlin on June 19 to announce a new U.S. nuclear weapons policy. While couching his remarks in a call for nuclear arms reduction by the United States and Russia, the speech was accompanied by the release, back in Washington, of a new Department of Defense report to Congress that called for the U.S. to develop a new generation of counter-strike weapons—both nu-

clear and conventional—to defeat potential adversaries. Russia and China clearly recognized the new policy as a direct threat to the precarious thermonuclear weapons balance between both nations and the United States.

On June 19, President Putin raised the issue, highlighting the dangers of nations developing precision non-nuclear weapons that could be used in a conventional first strike to knock out even nuclear weapons capabilities. "There has been increasing talk among military analysts," he warned, "about the theoretical possibility of a first disarming strike, even against nuclear powers." He went on to attack the U.S. plans for deploying a European ballistic missile defense system. "We know, too, that the United States is continuing work on its strategic missile defense system. This project is undergoing some reconfiguration in terms of time and geography, and we welcome these steps our American partners are taking. But at the same time, no one has renounced the program and it is still going ahead. The question is only one of time: which component of the missile defense system will be deployed and when."

"We cannot accept a situation that would put the strategic deterrent system out of balance and make our nuclear forces less effective," he said. "This is why developing our space and air defenses will remain a priority area of our military development plans."

The same threat has also been highlighted with regard to China. In the past two weeks, two studies—by George Washington University and the Carnegie Endowment—have questioned the logic behind the Obama Administration's "Asia pivot" and the military doctrine of Air-Sea Battle [see article in this section].

The strategic dimension of this threat to both Russia and China takes on urgency in the context of the escalation against Syria, which will pit the United States directly against both Russia and China, which have rejected the doctrine, first stated by Tony Blair in 1999, that the world has entered a post-Westphalian era, in which national sovereignty is no longer sacrosanct, and regimes can be overthrown by foreign military intervention.

The danger represented by this was clearly stated by noted American commentator Paul Craig Roberts, who, in a June 17 [column](#), warned, "If Syria falls, Russia and China know that Iran is next," and that after Iran, "they are next." He continued, "There is no other explanation for Washington surrounding Russia with missile bases and surrounding China with naval and air bases. Both Russia and China are now preparing for the war that they see as inevitable."