

Will War-Avoidance Measures Rescue Geneva II Conference?

Special to EIR

Jan. 20—Late on Jan. 19, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that Iran had been officially invited to attend the opening session of the Geneva II conference seeking an end to the three-year conflict in Syria. A day earlier, the Syrian National Council, the umbrella organization for many of the Syrian rebel groups fighting the Assad government, formally voted to participate as well. The inclusion of Iran came as the result of extensive diplomacy on the part of Russia, China, and the United States, in which Secretary of State John Kerry worked closely with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the days leading up to the UN announcement.

However, the very next day, Ban Ki-moon reversed the invitation, after U.S. officials and Syrian rebel groups threatened to boycott the conference if Iran attended with no preconditions. According to one U.S. diplomatic source, the reversal of the invitation came as the result of complaints that Iran had not publicly endorsed the Geneva I agreements of June 2012, on which the Geneva II conference is based. The source expressed confidence, however, that the talks will go forward and Iran will ultimately participate in the process.

The background to the controversy and the back-and-forth negotiations leading to the start of the Geneva II talks is as follows, according to a range of American and Russian diplomatic and intelligence sources:

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif traveled last week to Moscow for meetings with both Lavrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin. During those talks,

according to U.S. intelligence sources, Lavrov told Zarif that the U.S. was hesitant to allow Iran to participate in Geneva II unless it formally endorsed the Geneva I formulation, which called for a transitional government in Syria. Zarif, in an earlier discussion with Kerry, had hinted that he might be able to get that endorsement from Supreme Leader Khamenei.

It had been widely acknowledged—even by Kerry—that Iranian participation would be crucial to any potential for a breakthrough at the Geneva II meetings, which formally begin Jan. 22.

New Iran Sanctions Headed for Defeat

A number of other important developments preceded the Ban Ki-moon announcement and abrupt reversal. In Washington, opponents of Geneva II and the P5+1 negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program suffered a setback when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid announced that he would block Senate action on a new Iran sanctions bill introduced by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez, and Senators Charles Schumer and John McCain. Although the Senate bill has 59 co-sponsors, President Obama, under pressure from Kerry, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey, has promised to veto the sanctions bill if it comes to his desk. Sixty-seven votes are needed to override a Presidential veto.

The chances of an override were killed on Jan. 14,

when Sen. Dianne Feinstein, Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, delivered a blistering attack on the Menendez bill on the Senate floor. She declared that “Should these negotiations fall apart, the choices are few and the most likely result, in my view, is the eventual and inevitable use of military force. That is what is most distressing: If we had not reached an agreement, with the cooperation and leadership of the big powers of this world, that would be one thing. The fact is we have reached agreement and that action is just about to take place, and we are going to jaundice it, we are going to hurt it, and we are likely to collapse it by passing additional sanctions now which a President of the United States will veto...”

She concluded, “How does that make any kind of common sense? It defies logic, it threatens instant reverse, and it ends what has been unprecedented diplomacy. Do we want to take that on our shoulders? Candidly, in my view, it is a march toward war.”

Even worse, the Menendez bill commits the United States to go to war against Iran if Israel launches military action! “While I recognize and share Israel’s concern,” Feinstein declared, “we cannot let Israel determine when and where the United States goes to war. By stating that the United States should provide military support to Israel in a formal resolution should it attack Iran, I fear that is how this bill is going to be interpreted.”

Diplomats, Intelligence Officers Weigh In

Adding weight to these initiatives, a group of nine former top American diplomats and intelligence officers, including Ryan Crocker, Daniel Kurtzer, Thomas Pickering, Paul Pillar, and Frank Wisner, issued an open letter harshly attacking the Menendez bill. The Jan. 6 letter warned that “The bill will threaten the prospects for success in the current negotiations and thus present us and our friends with a stark choice: military action or living with a nuclear Iran.”

The same day that Feinstein took to the Senate floor, General Dempsey delivered his own sharp criticism of Washington policymakers and civilian national security officials who ignore the war-avoidance warnings of top military officials. In a widely publicized speech at the National Defense University in Washington, followed by an interview on National Public Radio, Dempsey warned that most Americans do not understand the “military instrument” and its limitations. Dempsey told the audience that “being the [JCS] Chair-

man actually requires me to be more *reflective* and much less *reflexive*.... If you don’t understand the difference in those two words, you’re in the wrong place.... We face a deficit that’s larger than our budget, and that is a deficit of understanding between those of us who serve in uniform and our fellow citizens.” He pointed to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya and the still-unfolding crises in Syria and Iraq, as clear indications of the actual limits of military force. Dempsey was one of the strongest voices, at the time of the Iraq invasion in 2003, warning that the conflict would be prolonged and it would hard for the United States to withdraw once there was a commitment of force.

The loudest and most frequent voice opposing U.S. military action, has been that of former Defense Secretary Robert Gates. Gates on Jan. 14 released his memoir of his four and a half years as Defense Secretary under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The book, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, and his speaking tour have been an attack on both Bush and Obama, and their civilian advisors, who rushed to war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, without consideration of the consequences, including the loss of life of American soldiers as well as foreign nationals. Gates has appeared on virtually every major news show on television and radio. On Jan. 16, he spoke before a crowd at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington at an event sponsored by *Politico* magazine.

The Gates-Dempsey-Feinstein efforts are paralleled by exhaustive Russian and Chinese diplomacy, both public and behind the scenes, aimed at preventing a new Middle East war that would almost certainly escalate into global conflict, one that could ultimately lead to a thermonuclear war of extinction.

Lyndon LaRouche has been writing and speaking about the danger of just such a war of extinction for months. In a soon-to-be-published paper, LaRouche warns that the world has been in a state of near-perpetual warfare since the ouster of Chancellor Bismarck in Germany in 1890. Bismarck’s ouster created the preconditions for World War I, which, following a brief inter-war period of rearmament, led to World War II, the onset of the Cold War, and a half-century of perpetual wars in Indochina, Central Asia, and the Middle East. All of these actions, LaRouche warns, have now brought us to the brink of yet another world war, at precisely the time that any such war, involving the United States, Russia, and China, would inevitably lead to the use of thermonuclear weapons.

Gates, Dempsey Speak Out On War Avoidance

Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has been interviewed widely about his new book, "Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War." Here are some of his comments.

Jan. 13, National Public Radio: Gates, asked whether it were appropriate to criticize a sitting President, replied: "You know, I did think about that, but the reality is if you look at the book as a totality, it's about war, it's about getting into wars, how you get out of wars, about the risks of launching military operations, whether it's in Libya or Syria or Iran. It's about dealing with China. It's about relations between the President and his senior military. It's about defense reform and how we ought to be spending our defense dollars. It's about the role of the Congress in all of this, and the impact of the dysfunction in Congress in all of these areas. These are all contemporary issues, and having worked for eight Presidents and being a historian, I felt I had a unique perspective. And these issues are with us today. These are not issues that can wait to be written about in 2017. And so that's the reason that I decided to go forward with the book."

On his comments about President Obama's staff, he said: "Well, I had a lot of battles with those folks. . . . I'd worked for probably three of the most significant and toughest national security advisers in our history: Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Brent Scowcroft. And there were things that went on in the Obama White House that, under those three guys, I'm confident would have been a firing offense, such as direct calls from NSC staff members to four-star generals, and so on. That just wouldn't have been allowed."

Jan. 15, Fox News: Gates was asked why he didn't wait to write the book until Obama were out of office.



DoD/Staff Sgt D. Myles Cullen, USAF
Former Defense Secretary
Robert Gates

"As we look at Syria, we look at Iran, China, Russia," Gates answered, "I've worked for eight Presidents, and I think I have a perspective on how to deal with these problems that I brought to those Presidents. And because those debates and issues are still before us, I wanted to put my views on the table." Gates said that "waiting to write those things in 2017, struck me, it would just make everything irrelevant."

He added that he "would like to see less micro-management from the White House," but that, "as much as anything, it is a message to the Congress, as well, about how damaging their approach and the way they are conducting their business, is to the national security of the United States. And people ask me, 'What's the greatest threat to American national security today?' And I say: It's encompassed within the two square miles that involve the Capitol and the White House."

MSNBC's Morning Joe: Asked why he had written the book, Gates answered: "Well, first of all, there are a lot of contemporary issues that are addressed in the book, both at the end, but also threaded throughout, in terms of, when do you use military force? What are the criteria? What are your goals? What are the consequences? What are your assumptions? We, for example, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, we made the assumptions that both wars would be short—a grievously wrong assumption. And I make the point in there, that that's an assumption often made when you launch military forces."

"So that has relevance as you look at Syria, as you look at potentially using force against Iran, if the negotiations don't work. It was part of the considerations when we were deciding to intervene in Libya. And so what I've tried to do is write a book that shows and humanizes, by bringing the personalities of the people into it, how Presidents wrestle with these questions of peace and war, the passion that comes to the table."

On Afghanistan, Gates said: "I thought our original goals were a fantasy, they were so ambitious." Gates made it clear he was referring to both Bush and Obama.

Jan. 16, Wall Street Journal: "One should be extremely careful about preventive war," Gates said, when asked to define the "Gates doctrine." Such wars

depend on high levels of accuracy and confidence in U.S. intelligence, and “frankly, we shouldn’t have that much confidence that we can get it right,” he said, citing the Iraq war as an example.

The Daily Show: “One of the points that I make in the book is that in recent decades, I believe, Presidents, when confronted with a foreign challenge or a foreign problem, have been too quick to reach for a gun to solve it. I said in another book I wrote 15 years ago, that the dirty little secret in Washington is that the biggest doves, wear uniforms. Because they have *seen* war, and they have *seen* the consequences, and they have also been sent into battle, sent into conflict, and seen political support evaporate because of political leadership, the lack of political leadership, or whatever. So one of the themes in the book is that we need to be a lot more *careful* when we deploy our forces, and when we use the military force, and be willing to admit that we don’t understand unintended consequences, and that we know very little, usually, about our adversaries. And we make assumptions like, ‘all wars will be short, and we’ll be in and out’—that’s 12 years after we went into Afghanistan. So I think there’s some cautionary tales in the book, that I hope will have some relevance as we look at the problem in Syria, and we look at the issues with Iran...”

Asked whether we’ve grown to see American power as being infallible, Gates responded, “Well, we have more power than anyone else in the world. I *do* believe that we are an indispensable nation—there’s really not any major international problem that can be solved without the United States being involved or leading the effort. But the reality is, we *can’t* solve every problem, and every time there is an oppression, or some terrible thing happens internationally, the answer is not necessarily to send in American troops. We need to pay more attention...”

Jan. 17, Politico: At an event in Washington, sponsored by Politico and the Bank of America, Gates was asked about his views on George W. Bush’s preemption doctrine. He said he was “by and large, very much against preventive war,” since you rarely had the degree of intelligence necessary to proceed. He quoted the American General Fox

Conner, who Gates said, had three maxims: Never fight unless you have to, never fight alone, and never fight for long.

“One of the few issues in the book where I am critical of the President [Obama], he said, “has been in his reluctance to speak out, particularly for the troops, on why success in Afghanistan is important.... I once told [former White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel] that I don’t object to the President’s speeches about exit strategies, but the troops need their Commander-in-Chief to tell them why he is sending them there and why their sacrifice is worthwhile.”

When asked what he would recommend to young people coming into government in Washington, Gates responded: “Read history.”

Dempsey Continues His War-Avoidance Drive



DoD/Staff Sgt Sun L. Vega, USA
Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman
Martin Dempsey

Jan. 14, National Defense University: Gen. Martin Dempsey stated that “being the Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], actually requires me to be more reflective and much less reflexive,” warning his listeners: “If you don’t understand the difference in those two words, you’re in the wrong place. So reflective is good, reflexive is not so good in terms of strategy.” He added that “we face a deficit that’s larger than our budget, and that is a deficit of understanding between those of us who serve in uniform and our fellow citizens.” He noted that the problem is not

that the military has lost contact with the American people, but “it’s really a lack of understanding about our role, not just during times of war, but in everyday life and the everyday business of protecting our national interests and promoting our values... and I worry the American public as a result doesn’t really understand what they’re buying, with all of the significant budget authority that they grant us.”

Because of this, he said, “I’ll need the remainder of my time as Chairman to actually fully unpack the definition of military strength and how it interrelates, and must interrelate, with other instruments of national power.”