

INTERVIEW: *Colonel (ret.) Richard H. Black*

# NATO Is Preparing For a Nuclear Strike on Russia—and Russia Knows It

*Colonel (ret.) Richard H. Black, a recipient of the Purple Heart, from 1963 to 1970 was a member of the U.S. Marine Corps. During that period, he served in the Vietnam War as both a forward air controller and helicopter pilot, flying a total of 269 combat missions. In 1976, after receiving a law degree from the University of Florida, he joined the U.S. Army's JAG Corps, where he served first as a prosecutor, and later, until his retirement in 1994, as head of the Pentagon's Criminal Law Division. From 1998 to 2006 he served as a member of the Virginia State House of Delegates, and from 2012 to 2020 as a member of the Virginia State Senate. He was interviewed on May 30 by Executive Intelligence Review's Mike Billington. Subheads have been added.*



Schiller Institute

*Former Marine combatant Colonel (ret.) Richard Black led the Pentagon's Criminal Law Division.*

**Billington:** This is Mike Billington. I'm with the *Executive Intelligence Review (EIR)* and the Schiller Institute. I'm speaking with Colonel Richard Black, an Army and Marine veteran who also served as head of the U.S. Army's Criminal Law Division at the Pentagon. He then also served in the Virginia legislature, first as a representative in the House of Delegates and then as a state Senator. So, Colonel Black, you are, I know, aware of the Ukrainian drone attacks on the Armavir Nuclear Early Warning Radar, approximately 180 kilometers from Ukraine, and a second unsuccessful attack, which occurred yesterday on the same site, as well as another attack on the Orsk Nuclear Early Warning Radar, which is 1,800 kilometers from Ukraine, a long way from Ukraine, on the Kazakhstan border. Several knowledgeable military and intelligence analysts like yourself, have warned as forcefully as they can that this directly challenges the clearly stated nuclear doctrine of the Russians, that the use of their nuclear weapons would potentially be activated by "any attack by an adversary against critical government or military sites of

the Russian Federation, disruption of which would undermine nuclear forces response actions." Of course, this is exactly what Ukraine has just done. What is your analysis of the level of danger that the world faces as a result?

**Col. Black:** Thank you for having me on today, Mike. I'd just like to add, because I'm always sensitive to the impression that someone might get that I'm perhaps not entirely patriotic about our country and our service members: I fought with the First Marine Division. First, I flew 269 combat missions by helicopter and then fought in some of the most fierce battles, actually the bloodiest battle of the whole Vietnam War for the Marine Corps. This was on the ground as a forward air controller. In my last battle, both of my radiomen were killed right beside me, and I was wounded. I was a Marine officer, then a Marine Company Commander later on. I then went back to school, on to law school, became an Army JAG (Judge Advocate General) Officer. I ended up spending several years in Germany, at Kaiserslautern, where I interfaced very heavily with the



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*Russia's Voronezh-M early warning radar in Lekhtusi. With NATO assistance, Ukraine has already attacked three other early warning radars.*

German authorities. We were prepared, and I was personally prepared, to die fighting in the defense of Germany during the Cold War, during a very, very tense period. So I don't hesitate to sacrifice, or to risk my life. And I've done it, literally on hundreds of occasions now.

With that, let me shift now. We've had three of these drone attacks deep into Russia. It is very likely that the United States was involved, that we provided precise information to assist the Ukrainians, assuming that they had any role at all. But certainly there were these drone attacks, one of them apparently very, very damaging to the Russian early warning system. From what I understand, the Russians do not have the type of satellite early warning system that we have. They may have some satellite technology that's helpful, but for the most part their nuclear early warning system is in "over the horizon," or [rather] "up to the horizon" type of intercept. They have somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes notice if the West fires a massive array of nuclear weapons aimed at Russia. There is a very, very brief time during which they can respond.

Now they have a very well defined nuclear doctrine. Russia's nuclear doctrine is exclusively defensive, and it provides for scenarios under which nuclear weapons can be used. One, of course, is if Russia is simply at-

tacked by nuclear missiles. Another one is if the Russian state is threatened by superior weapons, conventional or otherwise, which is actually an existential threat to the cohesion of the Russian nation. The most important, however, is that under their doctrine, they would be able to use nuclear weapons if they believe that nuclear missiles are being launched against it. In other words, if an attack is aimed at crippling its nuclear forces, if they believe there are missiles being launched which are aimed at crippling its nuclear forces, they can respond.

Now, if you look at where we are right now with the three drone attacks directed at their eyes and ears against nuclear attacks, this clearly would trigger the nuclear doctrine of the Russian state.

Now, in addition, if there's actually a cohesive movement towards a preparation for nuclear war—I'm not saying that we have made some sort of a decision, but we certainly are laying all the groundwork in case a decision was to be made. We're attacking their early warning systems by blinding them.

We have significant drone attacks against the nu-



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Karla Parra

*NATO countries are promising Ukraine dozens of U.S. F-16 fighter jets, which can carry nuclear weapons. Training, reportedly, has begun.*

clear bomber base in Russia, deep within Russia. Keep in mind that, from the Russian perspective, if you put yourself in their shoes, what do they see? They see that Russia is being blinded to where it can't detect incoming attacks. Also, its nuclear bomber fleet is being attacked, repeatedly attacked. Now we see NATO

moving nuclear capable F-16 jets into the country [Ukraine]. You put all those together, and it's a very nerve-wracking situation for Russia, where they have such a short period between a nuclear launch against them and a decision being made to counter that launch. What do they do? How do they respond?

One of the most dangerous things about the entire Ukrainian project is that, when the Cold War ended in 1991, the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union dissolved. The Warsaw Pact dissolved. At that point, there was a thousand mile buffer between East and West, a tremendous distance, where it made it very difficult for Russia to launch a surprise attack or for the United States to launch a surprise attack. This was an historic opportunity for both the West and the East to have protection against a surprise attack, and the ability to pick up the phone.

And we did create hot lines, where the president of the United States could call the president in Russia and say, "We're seeing something unusual. What's going on?" They could hash it out very quickly. This has been eroded, very deliberately, by NATO. They have moved the borders of NATO further and further east until finally, the last brick in the wall was Ukraine. Ukraine is a very large country, and even Ukraine itself provided a significant buffer between East and West. In 2008, there were discussions in which President Bush decided that it would be good if we move further, if we allowed Ukraine, perhaps, to become a member of NATO. This, of course, would mean that there would be the potential for nuclear weapons to be stationed immediately on the Russian border.

Now, if you put them there, you're talking about just a few minutes, five minutes, before Moscow is struck by nuclear weapons. So it was clearly an existential threat. There's a reason behind why President Putin, with tremendous reluctance, ordered his troops to cross the Russian border. Predominant in that was this idea that by making the border a NATO border, it would make Russia a nuclear target. So this was a tremendous problem.

This is not to say that the White House has made the decision that we're going to do something, but what you see is the Pentagon leaning forward, putting in place all of the mechanisms for a U.S. led NATO attack on Russia if the command authority made a decision that that was an appropriate thing to do. This is a very dangerous thing to do. It raises the possibility that

there could be an accident someone could misinterpret: aircraft coming in in a strangely provocative method, or some tremendous number of missiles that couldn't be identified. There are any number of scenarios. We're reaching the point where the time in which to react is so limited that Russia is almost forced to put into place certain procedures.

You would like to think that there was a central organizing intellect to the decision making, whether we were going to launch a global nuclear war that potentially could kill 60% of the human population of the Earth. But the United States and NATO have deliberately made this decision to eliminate this buffer zone and to create this terrible level of uncertainty by moving all the way to the Russian border. So that's where we stand right now, and hopefully no one will make a mistake. We're in a very tenuous situation.

## **The Dangers of the U.S. Nuclear First Strike Doctrine**

**Billington:** As you know, the Schiller Institute has gathered and circulated a [Red Alert](#) on this question, with statements from yourself and a number of other military and intelligence professionals. Unfortunately, since there's virtually no press coverage, or almost none, what do you think of what we're doing with this Red Alert press release, and what else would you suggest must be done if we're going to intervene to stop this horror from unfolding?

**Col. Black:** I think that the Schiller Institute Red Alert is excellent. All that we can really do is to preemptively lay out for the public the fact that there are now all of these pieces in place, to where the Russians can very easily perceive that we are on the verge of carrying out a surprise nuclear attack. It's very interesting that while the Russian nuclear doctrine is exclusively defensive, designed simply to ward off a nuclear attack from the West, that's not the case with the United States. The United States nuclear doctrine allows the United States to reserve the right to launch a nuclear first strike. This is essentially the Pearl Harbor option, where the President of the United States, who has the sole authority to launch a nuclear attack—can simply decide that he thinks that conditions are right, that the U.S. could benefit, and he can order a nuclear strike, a first strike, without the Russians having taken any sort of aggressive action. So we have a very dangerous nuclear doc-



trine, one that does not provide any sort of bumpers or curbs to limit the authority of the president. And of course, the Russians are keenly aware of that nuclear doctrine, just as we are aware of theirs. And so that makes the situation even more dicey.

We had the situation back early on in the war, Senator Roger Wicker, a Republican of Mississippi, second highest Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, made the statement that “we do not rule out the first use of nuclear action.” What he was saying was technically accurate, but for him to come out and say it—he was saying it in conjunction with some other things that we might do to react to Russia entering the war in Ukraine. For him to come out and just say we don’t rule out the first use of nuclear action, I think was terribly dangerous to the cause of world peace and to avoiding the potential for a nuclear conflagration. It’s an option that is always on the table, and the Russians cannot ignore it.

**Billington:** In your one-hour interview with me two years ago, soon after Russia launched their special military operation into Ukraine—that interview received over a million views. It literally went viral around the world, in many languages, and with hundreds and hundreds of comments—You warned at that time that the war could lead to a global conflict, even a nuclear war, if it wasn’t resolved by a peace negotiation. What happened to prevent such a peace negotiation?

**Col. Black:** There were negotiations underway, between Ukraine and Russia. These negotiations were proceeding productively because Russia didn’t want this war. People don’t understand. Russia did not want to go to war. They did not want to cross the border with Ukraine. But things had reached such an extent that it appeared as though Ukrainian forces were on the verge of attacking the Donbas, whose residents were primarily Russian speakers with historic ties to Russia. The United States had built up a very powerful military force in Ukraine with which to attack these two break-away republics, Donetsk and Luhansk. Those republics had very, very modest military forces and they would have very quickly been overwhelmed.



CC/Aimaina hikari

*The 2014 Maidan protests in Kiev, Ukraine, used by the U.S. State Department in a violent coup against the democratically elected government.*

Russia had previously put on the table to NATO a very explicit peace proposal to ward off any war. They went to desperate measures to avert a war breaking out. NATO just sort of blew it off. I think the decision had clearly been made that NATO would provoke the war. If it took having Ukraine attack the Donbas republics, they were just on the verge of doing it. So President Putin very reluctantly ordered the Russian army to move forward.

Now, people don’t realize that the Russian army—this is the army of the Russian Federation, not the old Soviet army, which was huge and aggressive, but the Army of the Russian Federation, essentially a home force. They were not an expeditionary force that projected power across the globe. They did not have major experience fighting really large wars. The biggest was their intervention, with great reluctance, into Syria, where they essentially had air power operating in support of the Syrian Army. Very, very little ground warfare. They had fought in Georgia. They had fought in Transnistria, which is part of Moldova. Those were tiny wars. They were like 900 people killed on all sides, including civilians who got caught in a cross fire. It was more of a clash than an actual war in Georgia, and in Moldova. So when President Putin ordered his attack in Ukraine, I think it was with the realization that either

he did it now and knocked off stride the Ukrainians who were about to attack the Donbas, or perhaps face the fact that the Ukraine army would roll literally to the borders of Russia, at which point the Russian people would demand that either he do something or they put in place somebody who would.

People don't realize that we provoked the war in Ukraine. This was a decision that was made by President Obama during his administration. In 2014 Obama gave the green light for the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department to assist in overthrowing the legitimate, duly elected government of Ukraine. We carried out a coup which successfully removed the elected president of Ukraine. We literally chose the cabinet ministers for the revolutionary junta that took place. And then we worked with them to where they did things that were so provocative that it caused some of the areas, Crimea and the two Donbas republics, to break away. We essentially forced Russia to cross the border and begin the war.

They were not ready at all at the time. And the Russian army was not structured for fighting overseas ventures or out of the country ventures. That's why initially the war did not proceed as they had hoped, as the Russians had hoped.

But they have changed, and they're now fully mobilized and ready to move forward. That is where we have come to be. I think what you see is NATO, and the United States as part of NATO, making this decision, that we will up the ante, we will escalate, we will take more and more perilous actions and take this thing right up to the edge of World War Three.

### **Ukraine Has Run Out of Manpower**

**Billington:** Even though now it's generally recognized, widely recognized, that the war has essentially been lost in Ukraine, at least on the ground, the danger is that, as you just indicated, the U.S. and NATO may decide to escalate to full-scale, open, direct war with Russia, even nuclear war, rather than to admit defeat on the ground. Your view?

**Col. Black:** Yes. Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the



Russian Ministry of Defense

*Russian troops in Ukraine. The NATO-provoked proxy-war continues to relentlessly destroy Ukraine's army in a war of attrition.*

top commander of the Ukrainian forces, has said that subsequent to President Putin's reelection, which went extremely well for him, that the Russian forces have become significantly more active. They have ramped up their offensive. While we don't know for a fact that the major Russian summer offensive has begun, it is clear that there is a great deal of activity on the border. The problem that Ukraine has is that they have simply run out of manpower. They're trying to mobilize some younger people, but they're not having very good success getting those people mobilized and to the front. There's tremendous resistance. The streets of major cities in Ukraine have emptied out since they issued the new mobilization orders. People don't want to go outside. They don't want to be rounded up by the authorities. People are not anxious to fight anymore because everyone who goes forward to the front ends up being killed or coming back an amputee.

What's happening is that with the spring the ground has become dry, and the drier it becomes, particularly as you edge into the summer, the easier it is to move heavy weapons forward and to bring in fuel trucks, to have tanks and bridging equipment. All these major heavy pieces of equipment are now able to travel and to travel rapidly. We know that the Russians have an enormous amount of armor, artillery, mobile artillery. All of their factories are online churning out weapons much faster than NATO or the United States is capable of doing.

The Russian army has now made a major attack against the second largest Ukrainian city, Kharkiv. Kharkiv is an odd position because it's located just a short distance from the Russian border, and yet it is the second largest Ukrainian city. All of a sudden Russia crossed the border, and the Ukrainian defenses were inadequate. There weren't enough people to defend the land leading up to Kharkiv. And the Russians moved out and captured as much territory within days as the entire Ukrainian counteroffensive—the highly touted spring counteroffensive last year—had captured in its entirety. And they did it with very few casualties. That forced the Ukrainians to move troops forward. So what's happening is you have this strain all across this thousand kilometer border. They don't have the people to plug it. And I think the idea is sinking into NATO and certain elements in the White House and the Pentagon, the State Department, that Ukraine is losing the war and that there's probably nothing we can do that will change that—unless we do something extremely reckless, and we literally go to war with Russia directly so that all of NATO will proceed to go to war. That decision hasn't been made, but we see them inching further and further. The French have now put in elements of the Foreign Legion. You can occasionally see photographs of a dead Frenchman wearing the patch of France on his shoulder. We're becoming more reckless, more aggressive. And it's just a question of whether we will reach a point where we say, look, this is inevitable

**Billington:** In an interview you did with our friend Jim Jatras, you compared the Ukraine-Russia conflict to the Civil War in the United States. Do you want to expand on that idea?

**Col. Black:** Sure. When the Civil War broke out,

the Confederate States of America had a military tradition. They weren't an urban population, they were an agrarian population. So you had people who were pioneers who built their own homes in the wilderness and they defended against marauders, with their own guns. The husband and the wife would defend against attacks at the windows. They were very militaristic in nature. The Union Army also had a very large contingent of southern officers and enlisted men who were part of the United States Army. Robert E. Lee was the top graduate of West Point—brilliant officer. Abraham Lincoln offered Robert E. Lee command of the Union forces, and Robert E. Lee declined respectfully, because while he had loyalty to the United States, his principal loyalty was to his state, as was the case with most everyone at that time.

So you had this Southern Army organized, well prepared, and you had a larger force, a Union force that came down out of Washington, D.C. and moved to Manassas, to a place later called Bull Run. The North was so confident that they were going to succeed that ladies came out in carriages wearing their parasols, and they wanted to see

this great slaughter of the Southern forces. Before the day was over, they were fleeing in panic as the Southern forces surged forward. So the South was very, very valiant, very organized militarily.

It's similar to what we've seen in the very early days of the war in Ukraine, where the Russians came forward. They expected Ukraine to fold quickly. Ukraine didn't. They had a very fine military tradition of their own, aside from the Russian tradition. And they fought very valiantly. Then what you had is, gradually, the two sides sparred. But just like the Union in the Civil War, the Union had the industry, it had the arms industries, it had the population, its population was roughly comparable to the difference



CC/Vitaly V. Kuzmin

*A Russian mobile Iskander-M—a guided, hypersonic missile—on its launcher. With a range of 300 miles, it can be retargeted during flight.*

between that of Russia and Ukraine. So just as now, Ukraine had some weapons factories, a considerable number, but most of those have been captured by the Russians already. The big industrial base is in Russia, not in Ukraine.

That was the same in the Civil War. In the South they did have weapons, and weapons production. But predominantly it was in the North. And eventually they fought. And they fought, year after year. Finally the South was bled dry. For that reason, Robert E. Lee rode in and surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. Now, it wasn't because the South hadn't fought. In fact, the South killed considerably more Union troops than the Union killed of Southern troops. But the South just did not have the people to replace them. And that's where we stand right now. The Union, of course, became more proficient at war. Their generals became better; their soldiers became more competent as the war went on. And that's happened with Russia. So at this point, I think we're approaching the Appomattox moment where there will need to be a surrender of the Ukrainian forces. We haven't reached that point yet, but I think we have the possibility that perhaps with the Russian offensive in the summer that may come.

**Billington:** The other thing you brought up in that interview, which I found striking, was your discussion about the fact that the American top staff, the general staff, the generals, have never really experienced what you call "high intensity warfare." They've only fought against weak and poorly armed Third World forces. Therefore when the Western generals planned the Ukrainian offensive last year, they simply weren't capable of dealing with the kind of an opponent they were up against in a major, strong, not only nuclear, but militarily and industrially strong opponent in Russia. And that you saw this as the main reason for the utter failure of the so-called Ukrainian offensive. You want to elaborate on that?

**Col. Black:** Yes. And not only that, but there's a lack of intuitive feel for what desperate combat is; high intensity combat. The last time we experienced high intensity combat was in Vietnam. I was reviewing some old papers from back in those days, and, there's a gentleman who fought with me in Fox Company, First Marine Regiment. He was recounting some of the things that hap-

pened. There's also a very good book that was written, called *The Road of 10,000 Pains* [by Otto J. Lehrack] that talks about the conflict in the Que Son Valley. These were bloody hand-to-hand combat battles.

This is what is happening in Ukraine right now! And Americans are not organized for it. They're not prepared for it.

So we're going to have to suddenly reorganize. We are having trouble recruiting people; we can't get people to join the military. They are not prepared to fight. We are led by these woke generals who are more concerned about pronouns and about critical race theory, and how can you divide your men up into oppressed and oppressors? We are a mess, our military today. We've changed the names of our bases and erased our military ethos—this mystic quality of "I'm from Fort Bragg. My Daddy was there. My Grandfather went from Fort Bragg, and was in D-Day," or whatever. We've erased it all. So we are not in a position to fight.

As a consequence, instead of thinking so much in terms of conventional, there is a great risk now that we begin to think in terms of tactical nuclear weapons, perhaps strategic nuclear weapons, something with which we can pull victory from the jaws of defeat. And that helps to make it a very, very dicey situation as this war begins to finally jell between Russia and Ukraine.

## U.S. Dirty Operations in Libya and Syria

**Billington:** Thank you. Let me move to discuss the Middle East a bit. You're somebody who has spent a great deal of time and personal energy and creative thought on issues of the Middle East, especially in Syria.

**Col. Black:** Well, I was actually fairly close friends with [former] Ambassador [to the UN, H. E. Dr. Bashar] Jaafari of Syria. I tracked the Syrian war literally before it began, because the genesis of it was with our attack on Libya. We attacked Libya. We invaded it. It was an unprovoked attack, by France, Britain and the United States. The major reason was that we needed weapons with which to overthrow the legitimate government of Syria. And so we utilized al Qaeda forces in Benghazi. We organized them through the CIA, and we had them rise up and basically start a revolution in Benghazi. The central government sent troops to try to bring order because the terrorists were taking postal workers and





CC/Bernd Brincken

*Aftermath of France's unprovoked bombing of Libya near Benghazi in 2011, another western coup.*

other civil servants, taking them up on high buildings, and just pushing them off, pushing them to their death. Colonel Gaddafi, who was very influential in the government of Libya at the time, said we're going to put an end to this. We're going to restore law and order. We can't have people thrown off of buildings to their death. He sent forces.

At that point, we used that as a trigger. We said, "Oh, he's going to be so tough on these people. All they're doing is having a little fun in Benghazi, pushing men and women off buildings." And we went in, first it was either the British or the French who started bombing. And then we picked up, we did the heavy, heavy lifting. Essentially we destroyed the entire country, all of the infrastructure, everything of value. And we captured their arsenal of weapons. We turned over an airfield that had been captured by the terrorists in Benghazi, and we turned it over to the Turks. We flew weapons into Türkiye under CIA Project "Timber Sycamore," which was later declassified. We had a great array of warehouses which we filled with these looted weapons from Libya, moved them across the border to supply al Qaeda in Syria. Ironically, it was precisely this al Qaeda who were the forces that had crashed the jets into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon just ten years earlier. And now we were their supporters. And to this day, we have been unwavering supporters of al Qaeda! They don't use the name al Qaeda in Syria, but there are documents which have identified them as al

Qaeda in Syria. So we have used the terrorists, used them to try to overthrow the legitimate government of Syria.

I followed that throughout the war. I was on the battlefield in two different places, not under fire, but I landed in Palmyra immediately after a great victory that blunted an enormous ISIS army that came across the desert, a hundred miles in perfect view of the United States aircraft. And we never dropped a single bomb, because we were hoping that ISIS would conquer the Syrian Army at Palmyra. They failed. I was there, and I was on the front line in Aleppo, shortly after Syria won the great Battle of Aleppo, which was

sort of like the Stalingrad of the Syrian war. I was on the front, in a building behind very heavy sandbags. I peered through the embrasure to look out to the other side. I knew there were snipers, but I also knew that it took them a certain time to sight in and to fire and



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*Russia's Mariinsky State Academic Symphony Orchestra held a concert under the direction of conductor Valery Gergiev to celebrate the Liberation of Palmyra in Syria in 2016.*





U.S. Army Reserve photo by Spc. DeAndre Pierce

*Uninvited American troops in Syria, shown on patrol, were sent by President Obama to control its food and oil supplies, and still occupy that part of Syria.*

for the bullet to travel. After I had looked through the embrasure for a few moments, one of the Syrian generals literally grabbed me and pulled me out of there, so that I wouldn't be a target. I think he didn't want President Assad to hear that he had allowed me to be shot by a sniper.

But in any event, I followed that very, very closely. It has some relevance to what's going on today, because for the longest time, ISIS and al Qaeda drove forward. They drove back the Syrians. And then there was the great victory at Palmyra. And then there was this back and forth, sort of a stalemate, a little bit like we've seen in Ukraine. Then there was sort of a shudder on the lines—on the al Qaeda and ISIS lines—and the Syrian Army began to break through, and the terrorists began to withdraw and to roll back. The Syrian Army moved faster and faster. And eventually there was a full retreat. Both ISIS and al Qaeda would have been utterly annihilated had it not been that President Obama, after swearing on whatever he swears on—it's not the Bible—that there would be no American boots on the ground. He sent in American troops. They worked to outrace the Syrian Army and to capture northern Syria, so that we would control the wheat, the breadbasket of Syria, and the oil. And that

way we would be able to impose famine conditions on the country and to keep them from having the oil with which to rebuild the nation. And that is the situation we're in today.

## **Will Israel Spark a General War in the Middle East?**

**Billington:** I saw your interview with the current Ambassador to the UN from Syria [H. E. Bassam Sabagh], in honor of the fact that Syria has now been brought back into the Arab League, after having been expelled for 11 or 12 years, even though they were one of the founders of the Arab League. Basically they were expelled as part of this Western ideological demonization of Assad and Syria. What do you think about the situation now with Syria, and what do you think the Arab states can do to try to intervene on this slaughter in Palestine?

**Col. Black:** Let me talk about the situation in Palestine with the other Arab countries. We have kind of a tenuous situation emerging there, and I don't know what will happen, but Egypt has recently had one or more of its soldiers killed by Israeli soldiers on the border. Now under the Camp David Accords from long ago, which were very successful—they ended the 1973 war, and Egypt was given control of the border of the Gaza Strip. And they allow certain produce to cross the border so that people can eat. There are 2.4 million people in Gaza, and the Israelis maintain a total naval and land blockade of the Gaza Strip so that all of the food, all of the building materials, anything that they need comes out of Egypt. Well, Israel has now captured that area so that presumably there will be a total blockade of everything, if Israel has its way. I suppose people will just simply perish over time. There's a great deal of tension in Egypt, and I understand the Egyptians are coming to grips with the fact that war may be forced on them. They don't want it, but it may just simply be forced on them. And Türkiye meanwhile, President Erdoğan, who has suffered some election setbacks, is, I think, rather tempted to respond to popular opinion. The Turkish people are furious about what is being done to the Arabs in the Gaza Strip. 35,500 have already died. I think the world was ready to accept a certain amount of reprisal from the Israelis after the settlers were attacked there, over a thousand, 1,200 or so, were killed. Not all of those were settlers—many of

them were military people, but there were a lot of civilians in the mix. And I think people were willing to say, okay, that was a surprise attack on them. They have a right to fight back. And so the world was generally supportive.

But as time went by, reprisal has to be limited in scope to be lawful, under the law of war. The reprisal became bigger and bigger, and it involved the killing of huge numbers of women and children and elderly people. It has angered the people of Türkiye. Türkiye's very important, because it's one of the world's great military powers. Their army is extremely proficient. They are experienced, and if Erdoğan were to turn them loose it would probably be a situation that would evolve, with a number of Middle Eastern powers converging on Israel. Egypt could be drawn in. Türkiye could be drawn in. Other countries, perhaps Syria could be drawn in, or even Jordan. None of them want war. None. Egypt doesn't want war. Türkiye doesn't. But the Israelis seem to be very anxious to sort of poke a sharp stick in people's eye until they trigger something that will get the United States to send ground forces and to engage in direct bombing campaigns. It is an extraordinary danger for the United States if we end up fighting all of the powers of the Middle East, and at the same time, we're involved in a war with Russia and Ukraine. It's a dicey period.

Now for the Syrians themselves, I think they look at it and they say "Syria would have rebuilt. It would have had a tremendous revival." The young men of Syria don't want war. They've had war that's gone on and on and on. And whether they were on the side of al Qaeda or of Syria, they would just like to turn their swords into plowshares and rebuild; build families and that kind of thing.

The war would have easily ended were it not for the American blockade, the enormous sanctions, devaluing their currency, possibly being the ones who bombed the Beirut harbor, that tremendous bombing that wiped out the banking industry in Beirut. So Syria is ready for peace. But they're also prepared for war. I mean, they have a powerful army. It's well equipped. And Israel has been attacking them, without any declared war and without the Syrians firing back. There have probably been a thousand attacks by Israel. It's sort of like a constant terror war from the air, where they will simply go in—just like they attacked the Iranian consulate in Damascus. I think they did it in order

to do the most outrageous thing that they could do to Iran in hopes that Iran would respond, and that would draw the United States directly into the war. Fortunately, this was one instance where the White House and the Pentagon did a masterful job of averting the war, and the Iranians did a very responsible job of averting the war. And Netanyahu's plan to draw the U.S. into the war failed in that particular instance.

**Billington:** I understand you're going to speak at the International Peace Coalition meeting tomorrow morning [May 31], right?

**Col. Black:** Yes, that's correct. And I hope people will listen in. There are going to be some tremendous speakers. Basically, the Schiller Institute is trying to mobilize public opinion to bring a greater air of caution, because it's by preempting the most aggressive and most reckless people that we have managed to ward off some of the worst excesses during this war. And if we can continue doing it successfully, then perhaps peace will come and we can reconsider our foreign policy and some of the very grave mistakes that we've made recently.

**Billington:** Well, thank you very much, Colonel Black. I always appreciate hearing from you and especially having a chance to talk with you like this. We will certainly get this interview widely circulated. It certainly is time for action if we're going to avoid this disaster. I think we have to maintain a certain optimism that the vast majority of the world is turning against the insanity of this colonial policy that still dominates the Western world. They have another option, by turning to Russia and China and the BRICS countries, which are countries which are now expanding and demonstrating really a policy much like what America used to represent in terms of going out and developing the world rather than blowing it up.

**Col. Black:** Well, thank you very much for having me on. And I certainly hope that we're successful in warding off any reckless ideas floating through the White House and the Pentagon that it would really be a good idea to ratchet up and perhaps put the nuclear bombs on the jets and on the missiles.

**Billington:** Exactly. Okay. Thanks very much.