

# U.S. Military, Diplomats Seek War-Avoidance with Russia

by Carl Osgood

March 22—A concerted effort is now underway, according to high-level U.S. intelligence sources, on the part of a network of active-duty and retired U.S. military, intelligence, and diplomatic officials, to repair the severe damage that has been done to relations between Washington and Moscow over recent years. Among the hotly contested issues are the Obama Administration's regime-change policies in Libya and Syria, the NATO deployment of an ABM system that could target Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal, and Washington's de facto backing of international narco-terrorist organizations that are flooding Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Union with heroin, and carrying out terrorist attacks.

Lyndon LaRouche, in his March 15 webcast ([www.larouchepac.com](http://www.larouchepac.com)), fully endorsed that patriotic effort from the U.S. side, and cited the upcoming trip to Moscow, in mid-May, by Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey, as a critical opportunity to reach a war-avoidance agreement between the world's two leading thermonuclear weapons powers. Dempsey is among those military leaders in both countries, who have the clearest understanding of the dangers in the current strategic global showdown.

## Dempsey Is on Record

The tone for the week was set by Dempsey in remarks on March 18 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, where he told a

standing-room-only crowd that he could see no military option in Syria that he would recommend. He issued that warning in response to a question from Maj. Gen. Buster Howes, the chief of the British Defence Staff in Washington, who noted that British Prime Minister David Cameron is making a comparison between “the West's failure to act” in Bosnia in the 1990s, and the situation in Syria, today. “The heady days of the Arab Spring and democratization seem a long time ago,” Howes said. “How do you think the West's failure to act in Syria will affect the American people's relationship with the people of the Middle East in the future?”

Dempsey rejected the premise of the question out of hand. “The heady days of the Arab Spring are actually playing out about like anyone who studied history should expect them to play out,” he said. “When strong men are overthrown, historically, the first generation that takes their place struggles. And then oftentimes, the next generation that takes their place will overcompensate, and it's the third generation, generally, that gets it right. ‘Right’ in the sense of balancing the needs of the center with the needs of the people. So I think, you know—what are we, two years into the Arab Spring—and we're ready to declare it a failure? I think that's a little premature, frankly.”

Dempsey stressed that even defining American interests and what we hope to achieve in Syria, is “a tough question to answer.” He cited humanitarian concerns, issues related to chemical and heavy weapons as well as

the security of Syria's neighbors that the U.S. has a national interest in. "But in the middle of all that," he said, "is the fact that about six months ago we had a very, let's call it opaque understanding of the opposition, and now I would say, *it's even more opaque*" (emphasis added).

"So, six months ago the situation seemed to me to be very unclear," he went on. "The number of groups seemed to me to be very unclear. And today, that number—and that issue, seem to be even less clear in some ways. And so I think that the path, which is a path to build consensus among partners, a path to do collaborative estimates of the situation, to plan not only for what's happening today, but the potential for the day after, as it's commonly called. You know we're doing all that.

"But, I wouldn't compare, first of all, because historical comparisons generally fall apart pretty quick. I'm not sure that the comparison of this situation to Bosnia stands that test. And I think we should be doing everything we're doing—with all of the instruments of power. But the military application of power should be the very last instrument we employ. And we're doing planning, so that I can provide options.

"But again, I don't think at this point I can support, I can see a military option that would create an understandable outcome. And until I do, it will be my advice to proceed cautiously."

### Foreign-Policy Mandarin Gelb

Leslie Gelb, former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, a veteran news columnist, and a former official in both the State and Defense Departments, warned in an article posted on March 20 on the Daily Beast website, that the United States is about to make the same mistake in Syria, that it made in going to war in Iraq. "Only in America where our intellectual energies are fully consumed by reality TV and stranded cruise ships full of poop could we possibly be committing the very same mistakes regarding Syria that got us into war with Iraq a mere ten years ago," he wrote.

"We are putting ourselves under greater and greater pressure to take the first steps toward war in Syria. God love us, we feel properly guilty about upwards of 70,000 Syrians slaughtered and millions of refugees



Gen. Dempsey's Facebook page

*Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey speaking at CSIS in Washington, March 18, 2013.*

and displaced persons. But the devil lures us into believing that the only way to help these Syrians is for the United States to take those first little military interventionary steps that would soon lead to bigger and bigger ones. This is not anti-war blue smoke; it's precisely what we did in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. It's the good, old American tradition in world affairs of leaping before we ask. The tough questions are just sitting ducks waiting for us—Congress, journalists, the media, and the administration itself—to ask. If we don't ask them, and if we don't answer them to some reasonable degree, it's likely we will find ourselves at war in Syria within a year."

Gelb noted the interventionists don't know "squat" about Syria, and quoted Dempsey, from his CSIS remarks, on how we have "a very opaque understanding of the opposition." So, who the heck would we be arming and bringing to power? "We have to ask ourselves whether a rebel victory in the next year or so would actually result in a victory for the jihadis," Gelb wrote. "And just imagine an Al Qaeda-like regime with access to chemical and other modern weapons ruling Syria."

Gelb concluded by saying that the way to a sensible strategy is by learning the lessons of all of our failed past interventions. He then quoted Dempsey again on his view that there is no military option that he can see. "Aren't those the words of wisdom after our Iraq experience?"

## A Voice for Those in the Pentagon

An indirect warning from the military came in the March 21 *Washington Post*, through the pen of veteran national security reporter Walter Pincus. Pincus is one of those journalists who knows the national security establishment so well that it looks to him to report its concerns. He used the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Iraq invasion to ask the question: Have we learned anything?

“The fact is neither [Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul] Wolfowitz nor [President George W.] Bush nor other senior policymakers knew much about Iraq’s culture and domestic politics. The result was that they totally underestimated the task being undertaken, which meant the loss of 4,400 U.S. service personnel and 32,000 wounded,” Pincus wrote. “What many forget is that Iraq and Afghanistan also mark the first U.S. wars in which a president, first Bush and now President Obama, has not sought a war tax. The result: nearly \$2 trillion in war expenditures put on the nation’s credit card. Have those pushing for military action against Iran, North Korea or involvement in Syria mentioned asking taxpayers to support paying for such operations?”

Pincus noted that everything Bush and Wolfowitz said about how cheap and easy the Iraq adventure would be, was wrong, yet their arguments have been facilely transposed to the Iran and Syria situations, today. Pincus, as had Gelb, quoted Demsey’s remarks at CSIS on Syria. “That response is evidence of hard lessons learned,” he concluded.

## An Active-Duty General

A more direct warning from the military was delivered, again at the CSIS, by Maj. Gen. H.R. McMaster, on March 20, two days after Dempsey’s speech. McMaster has a well-earned reputation for speaking his mind, having already challenged the lies that led to the Vietnam War, in his 1997 book *Dereliction of Duty*, and for slamming that collection of incompetent concepts collectively known as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). McMaster is now in command at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he is in charge of training the Army’s combat forces. In his remarks at CSIS, he blasted two cornerstones of current U.S. security policy. When asked, “What were the wrong lessons that we learned as a result of the last 12 years of war?” He sin-



USAF/Staff Sgt. Nestor Cruz  
Army Brig. Gen. H.R. McMaster speaking in Kabul on Dec. 11, 2011.

gled out the “raiding mentality,” and the notion that we will be able to outsource our wars, Obama’s “limited footprint,” or what’s officially called “building partnership capacity.”

What McMaster calls the “raiding mentality” is what Gen. Stanley McChrystal did in Iraq as a counterterrorism strategy, and then imported into Afghanistan when he took command there in 2009. McChrystal describes this in detail in his memoir, *My Part of the Task*. He was in command of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) from 2003 to 2008, and spent most of those years running it from Balad, Iraq. In short, the way it worked was that the task force in Iraq used all available means of intelligence to identify a target—he spends several chapters on the hunt for, and the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, for example—then to raid that target to acquire more intelligence that would lead to more targets, and thus, more raids. In 2004, McChrystal’s task force in Iraq was running about ten raids a month. By June 2006, when Zarqawi was killed, that rate was up to ten raids per night.

McMaster described the raiding mentality as deriving from certain concepts of the RMA: that you attack the nodes to bring down the network. That was an “unrealistic conception,” McMaster said. “Raiding didn’t solve the problem in Iraq.” McChrystal has some sense of this, too. In his book, he writes that what the troops under his command understood was that even at the time of Zarqawi’s death, the very success of his cam-

paign in Iraq had made him, or any leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, less relevant. “While he did not do so single-handedly, Zarqawi’s focused sectarian killings helped to inaugurate a system of violence that was, by the time he died, a self-propelling cycle. . . . We had killed Zarqawi too late,” McChrystal concludes. “He bequeathed [to] Iraq a sectarian paranoia and an incipient civil war.” Indeed, the problem was not solved, and still hasn’t been today.

“Building Partnership Capacity” is a cornerstone of the Obama Administration’s “light footprint” military engagement policy, and, indeed, is one of the *raisons d’être* for the U.S. Africa Command. McMaster described it as getting others to fight to serve our vital interests. This is problematic, he said, because it omits the fact that war is politics by other means. “What about the politics?” he asked. Those we get to fight for us, may have a view of their vital interests which is at odds with ours. Secondly, “Whose capacity are we building?”

In Iraq, we built the capacity of the Defense and Interior ministries, only for them to fall into the hands of Shi’a militias bent on sectarian slaughter of Sunnis (the militias, he said, were run by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps). He gave the further examples of Mali and Afghanistan, where elements of the security forces were captured by criminal patronage networks whose activities tended to make the conflict worse. McMaster didn’t specifically address Syria, but his questions, “What about the politics?” and “Whose capacity are we building?” get right to the point that Dempsey was making about how little we actually know about the opposition in Syria.

### **A Crescendo of Opposition**

Even before Dempsey set the tone at CSIS, there was a crescendo in Washington against the direction of the Obama Administration’s foreign policies, especially with respect to Russia. Richard Burt, who served two Republican Presidents in the 1980s and 1990s, as the ambassador to Germany, and in other senior policy positions, slammed the current U.S. approach to relations with Russia, during the opening event of a new think tank, the Center on Global Interests, in Washington, D.C. on March 12.

Veteran journalist Martin Sieff, reporting for the Voice of Russia, recounts that Burt told the gathering of veteran diplomats and scholars that the U.S. practice of lecturing foreign countries, and Russia in par-

ticular, on human rights, is counterproductive. He also warned that the Magnitsky Bill, which penalizes Russian nationals for their alleged roles in the death of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, produced a “spiral of response and counter-response” that would prove extremely harmful for both the United States and Russia.

“I don’t think it’s very productive to publicly castigate foreign governments,” Burt said. “It just embarrasses and humiliates the other party, and it is counterproductive.” He advised, “A quiet strategy of working with foreign governments to reform, in my judgment, is far more effective than the public criticism that is so popular in Congress and in different parts of this town.”

Then on March 18, Jack Matlock, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union, attacked the planned U.S.-European missile-defense project, which has aroused great concern in Russia. “The project is driven by the military-industrial complex and by some ‘true believers,’” Matlock said. Speaking at a conference entitled “Russia as a Global Power: Contending Views from Russia,” sponsored by the Elliott School of International Affairs, in Washington, Matlock went on to talk about the SDI project of President Reagan (during which period of time he was the National Security Council person responsible for Russia). The Reagan proposal, he explained, was a collaborative proposal. “If Gorbachov ever said, ‘Let’s do it together,’ Reagan would have agreed.”

Under present conditions, he warned that, “if we do missile defense, we have to do it with Russia and China. We have to do it together. This is what we should be looking at. Competition in a globalizing world doesn’t make much sense.”

In reply to a question from *EIR*’s William Jones, Matlock elaborated on the SDI debate in the Reagan Administration, indicating some of the back and forth about the program and the connection to nuclear arms reductions. “It is absurd to believe the myth that the ‘SDI brought down the Soviet Union’ or that it was an attempt to create a new arms race,” Matlock said. “Reagan was willing to significantly reduce the nuclear arsenals, if he were able to proceed with the research on an SDI system. If it proved successful, he was willing to share it with the Russians. I asked Gorbachov in later years if there were any possibility that they missed finding common ground on the issue. Gorbachov indicated that he simply wanted to get rid of the program entirely.”