

Obama Appoints Warmongers As Syria Peace Efforts Falter

by Jeffrey Steinberg

June 9—President Barack Obama defiantly responded to the growing pile-up of scandals surrounding his Presidency and the military victories by the Syrian Army over the past week, by naming the discredited Susan Rice as his new National Security Advisor, and by appointing George Soros clone and radical humanitarian interventionist Samantha Power as Rice's replacement at the United Nations (see following article). Obama's flight-forward nominations, including the promotion of Victoria Nuland, a former advisor to both Bush-Cheney and Obama, as the new U.S. ambassador to the European Union, have caused growing alarm that the President could order an escalation of U.S. military involvement in Syria, at precisely the moment that many Washington strategic analysts are coming to the conclusion that President Bashar al-Assad may defeat the two-year, foreign-backed regime-change campaign. These analysts recognize that an Assad victory may be the best among a series of bad options for Syria.

The Syrian Army has won important military victories in the past week in Qusair, a crossroad city near the Lebanese border; in the suburbs of Damascus; and in the Aleppo area in the north of the country near the Turkish border.

In response to these military gains, Gen. Salim Idris, the titular head of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels, demanded that the scheduled Geneva II peace conference be postponed, in the expectation that foreign gov-

ernments will beef up the flow of weapons to the FSA to reverse the recent military setbacks.

While fools like Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), recently returned from a mission to Syria, where he conferred with Idris—and had his photograph taken with two rebel jihadists who have kidnapped foreign nationals—continue to demand a no-fly zone and heavy arming of the Syrian rebels, regardless of their al-Qaeda ties, there is a growing determination in Washington to push back against any further U.S. involvement in the conflict there.

Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove, who was installed as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander on May 13, in an interview with *Stars and Stripes* during a May 30 visit to the U.S. Naval headquarters in Naples, Italy, warned against the consequences of establishing a no-fly zone over Syria. "It is quite frankly an act of war, and it is not a trivial matter," he said.

No-Go to No-Fly Zone

On June 7, the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations held a briefing on Capitol Hill, attended by some 200 Congressional staffers, diplomats, journalists, and Middle East experts. Two speakers from the National Defense University lambasted the idea of a no-fly zone, and noted that in the aftermath of the Libya NATO intervention to overthrow and execute Qaddafi, there is strong Russian and Chinese opposition to any repeat of



The Syrian Army's military victories in Qusair, near Damascus, and in Aleppo, have shifted the strategic situation in Assad's favor, while the rebels have acted to scuttle peace efforts. Shown: Syrian Army soldiers celebrate in Qusair June 5.

the Libya fiasco in Syria. Col. David DesRoches and Dr. Paul Sullivan both warned that the Syria situation could easily escalate into a regional or global war if the United States were to take any further action.

Another speaker, Mona Yacoubian of the Stimson Center, showed how the Syria conflict has already been turned into an out-of-control regional war, which threatens to become a permanent conflict between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims.

Because of the continuing intransigence on the part of the Syrian rebels, the Russian-American-sponsored Geneva II meeting has been postponed to July, at the earliest. Britain and France remain opposed to including Iran in the conference, and continue to press for Western military aid, including more advanced systems, to the rebels. So far, the United States has balked at overt arming of the rebels—although there is mounting evidence that President Obama has authorized a covert arms flow to the rebels from Benghazi, Libya.

The View from Russia

While Russia is clearly pressing ahead with the Geneva II plan, on June 8, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov chastized the new U.S. State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, for telling reporters that the purpose of the conference would be to implement a post-Assad transition. Lavrov made it clear that regime-change was not what he had discussed with Secretary of State John Kerry, and was not on the agenda. With the recent military victories by the Assad forces, boosted by flows of Russian weapons, and allegedly, by Hezbollah fighters, the likelihood that Assad will remain in

power is greater than at any point since the eruption of the conflict over two years ago.

Given the new reality on the ground, it cannot be ruled out that the rebels will boycott the peace conference altogether, or fail to make any serious effort at a peace deal, even if they take part. A senior U.S. intelligence official, who has been working on the Syria issue for years, described any such Syrian rebel intransigence or boycott, as “the nightmare scenario that nobody has an answer to.”

Furthermore, on June 6, the press spokesman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff told reporters that JCS Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey's scheduled visit to Moscow in mid-June had been postponed indefinitely. The announcement came shortly after President Obama's announcement of the Rice and Power appointments. While the

Pentagon spokesman tried to minimize the significance of the postponement, noting that Dempsey and his Russian counterpart, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, had conferred by videoconference on June 3, and maintain close and regular contacts, the delay was worrisome, given the pivotal role that Dempsey has played in the war-avoidance efforts in Washington.

In a related development, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that it had carried out a third successful test on June 6 of a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin, in remarks to a conference of the United Russia Party, June 7, dubbed the new ICBM a “missile defense killer,” and said that “neither current nor future American missile defense systems will be able to prevent that missile from hitting a target dead-on.” At about the same time, the Defense Ministry announced that the Strategic Missile Forces will conduct a full schedule of 200 exercises over the next six months. And, in an interview with Rossiya 1 TV on May 25, Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov, stated, “If or when an American missile defense system is created, aimed at undermining Russia's nuclear deterrence forces, the Defense Ministry will take certain steps that will not allow the Americans to achieve this undesirable result.”

Regional Flashpoints

On June 7, the *New York Times* reported that Israel is increasingly worried about instability along its northern borders with Syria and Lebanon. Syrian rebels briefly seized control of a United Nations checkpoint on the Golan Heights, and the Syrian Army had to battle

to drive the rebels back and secure the safety of the UN peacekeepers. According to the *Times*, Israeli war planners have accelerated planning for a “shock and awe” campaign against Lebanon to wipe out Hezbollah’s stronghold there. At the Capitol Hill event, Dr. Paul Sullivan sharply attacked the idea of such an Israeli action, asking the audience: “Is there anyone here who thinks this is a good idea?”

Ironically, any Israeli action against Hezbollah in Lebanon would put Israel in an alliance with Saudi Arabia. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the head of the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate (GID) is pouring money and weapons into northern Lebanon to back Sunni jihadist networks attacking Hezbollah. A prominent Sunni cleric based in Qatar has called for a holy war against Shi’ites, and several leading Saudi clerics have joined the call for jihad.

British policy towards the region has been to foment a permanent religious war within Islam to create the conditions for what they call “managed chaos,” but which is actually brutal population war, in which the objective is measured in body counts rather than military outcome. A recent study by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) celebrated Britain’s return to “East of

Suez,” with plans for major expansion of British naval and air force presence in the Persian Gulf—underwritten by arms sales to the Gulf Cooperation Council, along with City of London management of all of the sovereign wealth funds of the oil-rich sheikhdoms.

Israel continues to threaten to take preemptive military action if Russia goes ahead with announced deliveries of S-300 advanced air defense systems to the Assad government.

The situation in the region has been further thrown into chaos by a week of rioting in Turkey. And May was the most deadly month in Iraq in several years, with sectarian violence reaching a new level. Sources have again pointed to Saudi Arabia and to Prince Bandar for bank-rolling and arming Sunni jihadists, including al-Qaeda in Iraq, the sister organization to Syria’s al-Nusra Front.

Iran will hold presidential elections June 14, the outcome of which is uncertain. Four years ago, the last time presidential elections took place, huge protests erupted, leading to a crackdown on reformist factions. No matter what the outcome of the vote, sometime over the Summer, talks between Iran and the P5+1 (UN Security Council Permanent Five plus Germany) will resume over Iran’s nuclear program.

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