

# On the Brink of World War in 2015?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Jan. 4—New Year's celebrations this year were set against the growing danger of world war, and efforts to prevent the outbreak of conflict in the early moments of 2015.

Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin and Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Valeriy Gerasimov, made clear, in year-end statements and interviews, that Russia is fully prepared to strategically counter the drive for regime change in Moscow, coming from NATO and the Obama White House.

On Dec. 29, in an interview with Rossiya 24 TV, General Gerasimov reviewed Russia's progress toward an overhaul of its strategic nuclear strike force triad, with the testing of a new generation of mobile land-based ICBMs, and the deployment of three new Borei-class nuclear-armed submarines to the Northern Fleet.

He said that the strategic modernization is a top priority, in line with Russia's recently issued new military doctrine.

In the Nov. 24-30 issue of the Russian Ministry of Defense journal *Military Thought*, a lengthy article appeared under the headline "Political Engineering of Color Revolutions—Ways To Keep Them in Check," which recapitulated the Russian command's assessment that Western powers are engaged in a 21st-Century form of regime-change warfare, based on fomenting "managed chaos" to overthrow governments, particularly in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) region, including Russia.

The danger of war, driven by the blowout of the trans-Atlantic financial system, was also highlighted by Willy Wimmer, the former national security advisor to Germany's Christian Democratic Union, in a strategic analysis, titled "Will Everything Blow Out in 2015?" Wimmer points to several triggers: the prospect of a Greek departure from the euro; London decoupling from the EU; a Le Pen takeover in France; and the Obama Administration's "institutionalizing the enemy status" of Russia. Wimmer cited the British imperial tradition of Cecil Rhodes as the driver for the current war danger.

Wimmer's warnings were echoed by Patrick Buchanan, writing on the Jan. 2 antiwar.com and asking: "Is War in the Cards in 2015?" Buchanan cited the recent Congressional passage of HR 758, a provocation against Russia, and President Obama's sanctions against Moscow, as a driver for war. He warned that Congress will likely vote to provide arms to Kiev, and that this could be the trigger for a harsh Russian military response.

### **Some Getting Cold Feet?**

The Obama Administration has announced new sanctions against four Russian government officials under the Magnitsky Act, prompting a strong condemnation from the Russian Foreign Ministry, which warned that such hostile actions could wreck any Russian cooperation with Washington over crucial issues like the P5+1 negotiations with Iran, and the ongoing Russian-led efforts to reach a political solution to the four-year Syrian conflict, which has given rise to the Islamic State.

The threat of imminent war has become so pronounced that some of the leading war provocateurs are losing their nerve and warning about the danger. Former

Ukraine President Viktor Yushchenko, who was installed in the mid-2000s in the first phase of the Orange Revolution, said in a late December interview that 60% of the Ukrainian people oppose the current government's move to integrate into the European Union and NATO.

Even Adrian Karatnycky, the former head of Freedom House, and the current director of the Atlantic Council's Ukraine in Europe Task Force, warned that the Right Sector and hard-core anti-Russian Ukrainian oligarchs who finance the extremist gangs, pose a threat to the security of Ukraine and must be brought under control immediately.

### **Some Efforts To Push Back**

Even as Wall Street and London drive the world towards a strategic confrontation that could lead to thermonuclear war and extinction, there are some signs of resistance. At the close of the year, the foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France held a conference call aimed at restarting the Minsk Accords of September 2014 to settle the crisis in Ukraine. The four ministers agreed that an immediate reconvening of the Contact Group was necessary, and there are reports of several meetings upcoming in early January, in Berlin, and in Astara, Kazakhstan to revive the effort.

In a sign of Russian willingness to facilitate the de-escalation of the Ukraine crisis, President Putin announced that Russia would begin delivery of 500,000 tons per month of coal to Ukraine—without pre-payment.

Russia is also working to host a January negotiating session in Moscow of the Syrian opposition, including both internal and foreign-based groupings, with representatives of the government. Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Bogdanov has been leading the effort, after visiting both Damascus and Ankara (where the opposition groups are headquartered). The Russians have been pressuring President Bashar al-Assad to fully engage in the dialogue with the opposition; Russia has leverage because Assad has asked Moscow for \$10 billion in new loans.

Egypt and Iran have indicated their willingness to cooperate in the Syria peace effort. And U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has remained in close contact with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on both Syria and Ukraine, although it remains unclear whether Kerry has any backing from President Obama and his White House inner circle for the diplomatic initiative.