

Brits Drive World War III Provocations in Gulf

by Jeffrey Steinberg

A growing number of American, Russian, Arab, and Israeli specialists are convinced that the world has moved ominously closer to a global confrontation, to be triggered by an American or Israeli/American attack on Iran, that could come in the immediate days or weeks ahead, and almost certainly by the end of the year.

The view that the world is “a sneeze” away from a strategic showdown in the Persian Gulf gained significant strength on March 23, when 15 sailors and Marines from the British Navy ship *HMS Cornwall* were arrested by the Iranian Navy, after they sailed into contested waters in the Gulf while conducting a search operation on an Iranian merchant ship.

Perfidious Albion

The role of the British in the fueling of a global showdown inside the Persian Gulf cannot be ignored or underestimated, except at grave risk. American military strategists interviewed by *EIR* expressed astonishment at the way that the British Navy had *apparently* bungled the search incident and the engagement with the Iranian Navy. But given Britain’s century-long presence as a colonial power in the greater Southwest Asian region, its still meticulous intelligence mapping of factions and clans in every corner of the Arab and Persian world, and its tradition of naval power projection, it is hard to easily conceive of the incident as merely the foolish blunder of a “declining power”—as opposed to a calculated move to turn up the heat, and then leave it to the Americans to directly confront Tehran.

The incident gravely escalated the level of tensions between Iran and the Western powers, at the very moment that the U.S. Navy was conducting live maneuvers in the Persian Gulf waters, just outside Iranian territory, involving two carrier groups; and the United Nations Security Council was unanimously passing a new series of admittedly weak sanctions against Iran over its alleged nuclear “weaponization” program.

Did the British intentionally “blunder” into an incident that had the potential to be the “Gulf of Tonkin” incident setting off a chain-reaction of events leading to general war?

While no definitive answer can be given to that question at this time, several U.S. analysts took careful note of an article that appeared in the March 17, 2007 edition of *The Economist* in a special report celebrating the 50th anniversary

of the European Union. The article revealed the state of mind of a significant faction within the City of London-centered Anglo-Dutch financial oligarchy, for which *The Economist* speaks. Under the title “The European Union at 100—Is the Best Yet To Come?,” the anonymous author engaged in a game of futurology about the global strategic alignment in 2057, the year that the EU turns 100:

“The EU is celebrating its 100th birthday with quiet satisfaction. Predictions when it turned 50 that it was doomed to irrelevance in a world dominated by America, China and India, proved wide of the mark. A turning point was the bursting of America’s housing bubble and the collapse of the dollar early in the presidency of Barack Obama in 2010.” The spinmeister author went on to report a massive expansion of the EU, including Israel, Palestine, and Russia, and the ultimate success of the euro as a leading global currency. At the end of the day, Europe had re-emerged as the leading global power, with the United States a crumbling and isolated basket case.

Putin Is Furious

American intelligence sources report that Russian President Vladimir Putin is furious at the Iranian government, for failing to appreciate the full strategic scope of the confrontation unfolding in the Gulf, targetted principally against Tehran. According to the sources, the Russian leader views the unfolding showdown in the Gulf as a step towards a much larger global confrontation, targetting Russia, China, and India.

Putin, according to the sources, wishes to see the situation in the Persian Gulf cooled out to avoid the military showdown that leading hawks in the Bush Administration, led by Vice President Dick Cheney, are out to provoke. Last November, Cheney’s unscheduled trip to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia aimed to draw the Kingdom into a long-term showdown between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims, exploiting King Abdullah’s and other Arab leaders’ anxiety over Iran’s re-emergence as a singular regional power, in the aftermath of the United States’ disastrous invasion and occupation of Iraq.

For Putin, the old judo master, the best strategy is to “run out the clock,” avoiding giving Cheney and Bush any pretext for confrontation before they leave office—particularly a confrontation on Russia’s southern border. Thus, his frustration



US Navy/Specialist 3rd Class Ron Reeves

American, French, and British ships operating with the Stennis Carrier Strike Group in the Persian Gulf, March 25. The build-up in the Gulf, and the British-orchestrated showdown with Iran, place the world a "sneeze" away from a strategic conflict.

with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has a penchant for reacting to every Anglo-American provocation with a predictable counter-provocation.

It is in this context that the British *Cornwall* incident must be judged.

Russian Warnings of Imminent Attack

Putin's own concerns about an imminent war have been echoed, repeatedly, in the Russian media over the past several weeks. One sensational article by military commentator Andrei Uglanov, published in the tabloid newspaper *Argumenty Nedeli*, headlined that an attack would be launched on Iran at precisely 4 a.m. on April 6. The date is significant because it is Good Friday in both the Orthodox and Western churches this year. The story played up Vice President Dick Cheney's recent AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) speech, promising that "all options are on the table" against Iran. Uglanov claimed that the air campaign against Iran was code-named "Operation Bite."

On March 21, Gen. Leonid Ivashov, former head of the Russian Defense Ministry's foreign relations department, gave an interview to RIIA Novosti, in which he gave credence to Uglanov's warnings of an imminent strike against Iran, stating his own conviction that an American air attack on Iran is a done deal. RIIA Novosti reported that, "Ivashov did not exclude that the Pentagon may use tactical nuclear weapons." Ivashov cited the recent withdrawal of an amendment to the supplemental Iraq War budget in the U.S. House of Representatives, that would have mandated that President Bush come to the Congress before any military aggression of any kind

against Iran, as alarming further evidence of a war consensus in Washington.

And again on March 27, Novosti cited an unnamed Russian military intelligence source, stating that, "the latest military intelligence data point to heightened U.S. military preparations for both an air and ground operation against Iran." The intelligence official said that the U.S. Naval presence in the Persian Gulf was back to levels that were reached on the eve of the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Indeed, on April 2, the *USS Nimitz*-led carrier group was scheduled to leave San Diego, bound for the Persian Gulf, ostensibly to replace the *USS Eisenhower*. By early May, the *Nimitz* is expected to arrive in the Persian Gulf, thus creating the possibility of the United States having three carrier groups in the region. The Pentagon insists that the *Eisenhower* is scheduled to leave the Gulf waters prior to the arrival of the *Nimitz*, but any kind of crisis could lead to the orders being rescinded or delayed.

Furthermore, according to a well-placed Israeli source, the Russians are not merely talking up the war danger, but are quietly airlifting modern military equipment into Syria, in anticipation of a possible renewed Israeli military offensive against Hezbollah positions inside Lebanon, that would also include attacks against Syria.

The Re-Balkanization of the Balkans?

Russian President Putin's concerns over a possible global showdown in the Persian Gulf have also been fueled by saber-rattling from London and Washington over the Kosovo situation, along with the Bush Administration's announced plans to place ABM equipment in Central Europe in the future.

A report to the UN Secretary General on Kosovo's future was recently completed by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari, calling for *de jure* independence. Russia has said it will veto such a proposal if it is presented at the Security Council.

In response, former U.S. Balkan envoy Richard Holbrooke penned a provocative op-ed in the March 13 *Washington Post*, threatening that if there is "a Russian veto in the Security Council, or an effort to water down or delay Ahtisaari's plan, the fragile peace in Kosovo will evaporate within days, and a new wave of violence—possibly even another war—will erupt. Accusing Russia of "defying" the United States, Holbrooke, who makes no secret of the fact that he covets the post of Secretary of State if the Democrats win back the White House in November 2008, demanded that President Bush "weigh in strongly with Putin," warning that "if Russia blocks the Ahtisaari plan, the chaos that follows will be Moscow's responsibility and will affect other aspects of Russia's relationship with the West."

Soon after the Holbrooke fit, *The Economist* chimed in with an editorial, in its March 24 edition, saying "Kosovo is heading for independence, whatever the Russians say or do."

Former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, now a top foreign-policy advisor to President Putin, penned his own reply to Holbrooke and the Brits in the *Moscow News* of March 23, under the headline "Opening Pandora's Box in Kosovo?" Primakov, just back from a trip to Belgrade, Serbia, made direct reference to Holbrooke's op-ed, writing, "While I was in Belgrade, Richard Holbrooke made a statement, predicting that delay in resolving the Kosovo issue would lead to more bloodshed. 'This is not an analysis, but a scenario,' a senior Serb government official said." Primakov went on to warn of a Kosovo conflict triggering a renewed Balkan war, spreading to Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia—what Lyndon LaRouche called the "re-Balkanization of the Balkans."

Bibi's Latest Moves

Well-placed Israeli sources within the Kadima ruling coalition party have also warned *EIR* that former Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is making serious political moves to return to power, and that he has assured Vice President Cheney that, if he takes over again, he will be prepared to launch military strikes against both Iran and Syria—in full coordination with Washington.

The sources warned that within weeks, the government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is likely to fall. Sometime in the second half of April, the Winograd Commission, appointed last September by Olmert to probe the disastrous July 2006 war in Lebanon, will issue an interim report. The report will focus on the roles of Olmert, Defense Minister Amir Peretz, and former Chief of Staff Gen. Dan Halutz in the military fiasco. The Winograd Commission is widely expected to call for Peretz's resignation as Defense Minister, and to trigger such a deep crisis that Olmert will be forced out.

According to an April 1 Jewish Telegraph Agency wire,

Likud chief Netanyahu is already negotiating with Kadima Knesset members to back his move to stage a no-confidence vote. With 61 votes, Netanyahu would claim the Premiership, or call for early elections.

The Israeli source reports about renewed Netanyahu-Cheney collusion are unquestionably true. On March 12, Netanyahu was in Washington for the annual convention of American Israel Political Affairs Committee. He used the occasion to hold a private behind-closed-doors meeting with the Vice President, the content of which, according to the Israeli sources, was a deal to hit Iran.

In his brief speech at AIPAC, Netanyahu resumed the theme of his 2006 speech: It is 1938, and Iran is Germany. Netanyahu railed that the entire world is "imperiled" by Iran's quest for a nuclear bomb. "Ahmadinejad is going for genocide, and we have to stop genocide," Bibi screamed, to roaring applause from the crowd. And in a not-so-veiled threat of Israeli attacks against Iranian sites, Netanyahu continued, "no one will protect the Jews if the Jews don't protect themselves."

LaRouche Skeptical About Arab Peace Initiative

In an apparent counterpoint to the rising war danger in the Persian Gulf, the Arab League convened in Riyadh, on March 28-29, and offered a public olive branch to Israel. In his opening speech to the gathering, Saudi King Abdullah called for regional solutions to the manifold crises hitting the Middle East, declaring that "the winds of hope will blow on the [Arab] nation, and then, we will not allow forces from outside the region to determine the future." Denouncing the U.S. presence in Iraq as "illegitimate foreign occupation," where "ugly sectarianism threatens civil war," the King demanded justice for the Palestinian people. The conference as a whole endorsed the 2002 Abdullah Plan, which offered a framework for peace with Israel.

The summit meeting was attended by a number of observers, including Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who met with 14 heads of state and other senior officials, including the Saudi King, Syrian President Bashar Assad, and Pakistani President Musharraf.

While the presence of Mottaki and the overall push for regional peace and stability, on the surface, cut against the British drive to foment a permanent Sunni versus Shi'ite conflict, LaRouche cautioned that the prominent role of Saudi National Security Advisor Prince Bandar bin-Sultan, the longtime Saudi Ambassador in Washington and an ally of Cheney, led him to view the summit outcome with great reservation. Given the forces consciously driving for war, in both London and Washington, the actions at the summit were hardly a check on the war drive. And with Prince Bandar in the middle of the effort, LaRouche warned, "something stinks."

Muriel Mirak-Weissbach and Rachel Douglas contributed substantially to this article.