



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 17, 2013

D.C. “Hawks” Rip Syria Weapons Agreement

Many of the foreign policy hawks in and around Washington appear to be lamenting the fact that the diplomatic breakthrough in the crisis over Syria’s chemical weapons has at least postponed the Obama administration’s planned military attack on that country over the government’s alleged use of chemical weapons against the rebel forces seeking to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Critics of the agreement reached on the inspection of the weapons sites and destruction of the arsenal say it is a win for Assad and for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who brokered the deal reached Saturday with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, following three days of talks in Geneva. But it is a defeat for the United States, they say.



“I do think Putin’s playing chess and we’re playing tick-tack-toe,” Rep. Mike Rogers (shown), the Alabama Republican who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, [said](#) on CNN’s *State of the Union* Sunday. “Think about where he is and what he wanted out of Syria. He got everything he wanted, including taking away the president’s advantage of a guaranteed or at least a credible military strike.”

Also speaking on CNN Sunday, former speaker of the house and 2012 Republican presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich [warned](#) of what he called a dramatic increase of Russian influence in the Middle East. “We’re relying on the Russians,” Gingrich said. “We’re now following from behind, not leading from behind. This is not a good long-term position.”

Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton lost no time in denouncing the accord, telling Fox News on Saturday that the agreement [“will die a death by a thousand cuts.”](#) Assad is required to make his initial declaration on the weapons and their location on Friday, September 20, Bolton noted, predicting: “It’ll slip a few days, or maybe a few more. Maybe the first declaration won’t be full and complete, and it’ll have to be amended. And, then, it’ll have to be amended again. You can see the impact of this as time goes on, and I think that’s exactly what the strategy is.”

Bolton accused Obama of squandering the support he might have had for a military strike against the Damascus regime by not going ahead with his threat of reprisal for the chemical attack, which has been reported to have caused the death of more than 1,400 people, including more than 400 children. “I don’t think the president himself wants to use force,” Bolton said. “Now, he will never have to — and he himself said, the longer time goes by from the August 21 use of chemical weapons, the harder it would be to generate the emotion necessary to get the support for the use of force.”

Polls have consistently shown substantial majorities of Americans oppose U.S. military strikes against Syria less than a year after the United States ended its combat role in a nearly nine-year war in Iraq and is still bogged down in a 12-year war in Afghanistan. Some Republicans and Democrats, however,



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have called for Obama to take action in accord with the “red line” that he announced in August 2012 would be crossed if Syria began making use of its stockpile of chemical weapons. In the midst of heated debate in the nation’s capital and on media outlets over whether Obama as commander-in-chief has authority to take military action on his own, the president asked Congress for a resolution authorizing the use of military force. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee [voted](#) 10-7 in favor of a resolution authorizing such force, but neither the full Senate nor House has acted on the measure.

The phrase “unintended consequences” has been heard often in recent weeks as a warning of what might result from U.S. intervention in Syria’s 2-1/2-year-old civil war that has resulted in the deaths of more than 100,000. Obama has said that ousting Assad from power would not be the aim of a strike in reprisal over the use of chemical weapons, but others voiced a desire to, as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) put it, “change the momentum on the battlefield in Syria” in favor of the rebel forces. Keeping Assad in power is a goal of the Russian government, Rogers said.

“He wanted Assad there,” Rogers said of Putin. “He gets to keep his warm water port. He gets to keep his military contracts. And he gives breathing space to both Hezbollah, which is fighting on behalf of Assad, and Assad. And he creates a problem for us with al-Qaeda operating in the [Middle] East. This was a big win for him.”

But both the United States and Russia might have greater problems with al-Qaeda if the Assad regime is topped by the insurgents, Putin has warned. In an op ed article in the *New York Times* last week, the Russian president [argued](#):

The United States State Department has designated Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, fighting with the opposition, as terrorist organizations.

Mercenaries from Arab countries fighting there, and hundreds of militants from Western countries and even Russia, are an issue of deep concern. Might they not return to our countries with experience acquired in Syria? After all, after fighting in Libya, extremists moved on to Mali. This threatens us all.

The push for military intervention in Syria did not begin with the reports last month of a chemical weapons attack on the anti-government forces. During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in July, Sen. McCain was clearly frustrated with Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey’s reluctance to divulge what advice he had given President Obama about efforts to help the insurgents. A week later, Gen. Dempsey outlined the military options in a letter to the committee and warned:

We must anticipate and be prepared for the unintended consequences of our action. Should the regime’s institutions collapse in the absence of a viable opposition, we could inadvertently empower extremists or unleash the very chemical weapons we seek to control.

I know that the decision to use force is not one that any of us takes lightly. It is no less than an act of war. As we weigh our options, we should be able to conclude with some confidence that the use of force will move us toward the intended outcome.... Deeper involvement is hard to avoid.

Like “unintended consequences,” the phrase “deeper involvement” has an ominous ring to it in light of America’s experience in Iraq and Afghanistan and the history of more than a decade of U.S. troops fighting and dying in what turned out to be a losing effort in South Vietnam. Nonetheless, Dempsey told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee earlier this month that if an order is issued to attack, the military stands ready to carry it out.



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“The military resources in place can remain in place and when you ask us to strike, we will make the strikes effective,” he said.

That did not appear to satisfy McCain, who remains dissatisfied with Dempsey as chairman of the Joint Chiefs and has threatened to put a hold on confirmation of his appointment to another term. “I really don’t pay a lot of attention to General Dempsey anymore,” the Arizona senator told the online *The Daily Beast*. “With me he just doesn’t have any credibility. That’s all.”



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