



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 2, 2013

Obama Asks Congress, but Claims Power to Launch Syria War Anyway

Despite absurdly claiming to have the authority to wage war on Syria without so much as a semblance of congressional authorization, President Obama, under immense pressure from the war-weary public and Congress, decided to urge lawmakers to approve his radical plan to [ally the U.S. government with Islamist rebels](#) in the effort to oust dictator Bashar al-Assad. Citing [dubious](#) supposed “intelligence” suggesting that the Syrian regime deployed chemical weapons, the administration seems confident of securing support from Congress — despite claiming not to need it and vowing to act regardless. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, however, are denouncing the claims, and some are pushing back.



Speaking during a [press conference](#) over the weekend, Obama said that, “after careful deliberation,” he decided the U.S. military should overtly join the war by attacking Syrian authorities. The announcement came after [years of quiet, unlawful assistance](#) to “opposition” forces — taxpayer funding dating to before the war broke out, [arms](#) and [training for rebel fighters](#), and [much more](#) — failed to depose the tyrant, a [former U.S. government terror-war ally](#). According to the president’s latest announcement, the military strikes would not constitute “open-ended intervention” or include “boots on the ground.”

Noting that U.S. forces are ready to attack whenever he decides — “and I’m prepared to give that order” — Obama nevertheless said he had made a “second” decision. “I will seek authorization for the use of force from the American people’s representatives in Congress,” he explained, as if seeking congressional approval were some sort of kind gesture rather than a [constitutional requirement](#) that could result in impeachment if ignored. It appears to more than a few analysts as though the major, bipartisan outcry against more lawless wars may have forced his hand.

“Over the last several days, we’ve heard from members of Congress who want their voices to be heard,” Obama continued, presumably referring to letters from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle warning the president that the executive branch does not have the authority to launch a war on its own. “So this morning, I spoke with all four congressional leaders, and they’ve agreed to schedule a debate and then a vote as soon as Congress comes back into session.”

Of course, in recent days, there has been deepening skepticism over the administration’s [alleged “intelligence,”](#) the desirability of [supporting radical Islamist rebels in many cases led by self-described al Qaeda operatives](#), and even the president’s credibility itself. In an apparent attempt to assuage those concerns, Obama also said he would provide “information” to Congress about the chemical attack, which numerous [experts](#) and [governments](#) have suggested was a so-called “false flag,” as well as why Syria’s civil war supposedly has “profound implications for America’s national security.”



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However, in a stunning display of either constitutional ignorance or brazen defiance of his oath to the U.S. Constitution, Obama re-emphasized his [wildly mistaken belief](#) that he could start a war without Congress. “I believe I have the authority to carry out this military action without specific congressional authorization,” he claimed, drawing a swift rebuke from critics while openly contradicting his campaign-trail statements correctly pointing out that the president cannot start a war without congressional approval.

While Obama claimed leaders in Congress agreed with his decision to seek approval from lawmakers, members of both parties have become increasingly vocal in trying to restrain the out-of-control executive branch. In a harshly worded August 28 [letter to the president](#), for example, well over 100 Republicans explained that the Constitution and the War Powers Act both require congressional approval prior to ordering the use of military force in Syria.

“Engaging our military in Syria when no direct threat to the United States exists and without prior congressional authorization would violate the separation of powers that is clearly delineated in the Constitution,” Republicans explained in the letter, adding that they viewed Obama’s reasoning in the unlawful war on Libya as “unconstitutional” as well. “If you deem that military action in Syria is necessary, Congress can reconvene at your request.”

More than 50 Democrats, meanwhile, fired off a [similar letter](#) reminding the president of the Constitution and his oath to uphold and defend it. “Congress has the constitutional obligation and power to approve military force,” their letter explained, adding that they “strongly urge” Obama to obtain congressional approval before committing U.S. forces to Syria’s civil war. The Democrat signatories also made clear that they wanted to see the United Nations investigation of the reported chemical attacks completed.

In a brief lesson on the Constitution, Democrat lawmakers also reminded Obama of the oath he swore. “While the ongoing human rights violations and continued loss of life are horrific, they should not draw us into an unwise war — especially without adhering to our own constitutional requirements,” continued the letter, drafted by liberal Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) and signed by 53 other Democrats. “As elected officials, we have a duty to represent the will and priorities of our constituents, consistent with the Constitution we all swore to uphold and defend.”

In his latest public speech, Obama correctly pointed out that the U.S. government does not need any sort of UN permission to act. “I’m comfortable going forward without the approval of a United Nations Security Council,” he said. The rhetoric, though, marked a sharp contrast to previous statements made by top administration officials who [claimed that the global body or NATO could, in fact, order American forces into war](#) without Congress.

However, despite the new tone on UN approval, among the primary reasons cited by Obama as justification for war were upholding the “international system,” standing up to others “who flout fundamental international rules,” following through on “the accords we sign,” and other similar notions about defending the world order. “Out of the ashes of world war, we built an international order and enforced the rules that gave it meaning,” Obama added, suggesting the U.S. government and American forces needed to continue serving as the muscle behind the deeply controversial “international order.”

Analysts are divided on why the president decided to seek congressional approval even as he falsely claimed not to need it. Some suggested that Congress may have finally been willing to put its foot down as recent polls [showed](#) less than 10 percent of Americans supported intervention in Syria. Even U.S.



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troops were flooding social-media outlets with [anonymous pictures of themselves saying](#) they did not join the military to [support al-Qaeda](#). Other analysts argued that Obama did not want to be solely responsible for joining a civil war on behalf of self-styled al-Qaeda Islamists — and all that would entail if and when the “rebels” succeed in taking over Syria.

Also, the president’s bid for congressional permission came shortly after the British Parliament rebuked U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron’s war mongering and voted not to join the conflict. The crushing defeat for the intervention agenda, unsurprisingly, sparked even more furious calls for Congress to rein in Obama’s unlawful schemes. After all, why should the British people’s representatives get to vote down a war while Americans’ voices are brazenly ignored?

Of course, in Libya, the president [defiantly ignored lawmakers](#) and the Constitution by launching an unlawful war to unseat despot Moammar Gadhafi — also a former U.S. government terror-war ally prior to the Obama administration’s decision to [support radical Islamists and al-Qaeda leaders against him](#). With Libya still in chaos — not to mention the ongoing Benghazi scandal and the [accompanying calls for impeachment](#) — it is possible that Obama did not want to push Americans any further, fearing an unprecedented potential backlash in the wake of yet another unlawful war.

Whatever the motivations for seeking congressional approval, however, senior administration officials have also made clear that Obama can and very well might attack regardless of what lawmakers think. “We don’t contemplate that the Congress is going to vote no,” Secretary of State John Kerry [said](#) confidently after Obama’s speech, adding [incorrectly](#) that the president has the “right” to take action “no matter what Congress does.” “America intends to act,” Kerry also said, dangerously conflating the out-of-control administration with “America.”

Still, despite open threats to ignore Congress and the Constitution — spectacular assertions that more than a few lawmakers, [even among Democrats](#), have suggested could be grounds for impeachment — news reports [indicate](#) that the administration is fiendishly working to obtain cover from Congress prior to launching an overt war. Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), a leading critic of unconstitutional wars in the Senate, [put the odds](#) of House lawmakers rejecting the bid at “at least 50/50.” Other members of Congress said they did not think the move would be approved, while some said it probably would.

It appears as though getting a declaration of war, which is [constitutionally required](#), is not even on the radar. However, even if Congress refuses to approve “authorization to use military force,” analysts say Obama launching an unlawful war anyway remains a very real prospect. Critics of the war mongering and the serious threat to constitutional governance are [urging](#) concerned Americans to contact their representatives and demand that Congress restrain the administration before it does even further damage.

Photo of President Obama: AP Images

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