



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 6, 2013

Obama, Putin Discuss Syria at the G20 Summit

Following a 20-minute discussion on the sidelines of the eighth Group of Twenty (G20) summit at St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 6, President [Obama remains committed](#) to a military strike against Syria, while Russian President Vladimir Putin maintains that such a strike would be “illegal.”



Reuters quoted a source who made a statement following a dinner held after Thursday night’s session of the summit, indicating widespread division on Syria among the participants: “There has been a long discussion with a clear split in the group.”

Putin told the press after his meeting with Obama: “We hear one another, and understand the arguments but we don’t agree. I don’t agree with his arguments; he doesn’t agree with mine. But we hear them, try to analyze them.”

Putin described the meeting as being “substantial and constructive.”

China’s Xinhua news agency quoted Chinese President Xi Jinping, who also spoke against military action: “A political solution is the only right way out for the Syrian crisis, and a military strike cannot solve the problem from the root,” said Xi. “We expect certain countries to have a second thought before action.”

The Reuters report noted that the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, indicated clearly on Thursday that the United States had given up efforts to gain Security Council support for military intervention in Syria, blaming Russia — which along with China holds veto power on the Council — for indicating that it would block such action.

With UN approval unlikely, Obama must now turn to Congress for approval. While this strategy is born of necessity, it actually results in a strategy more in line with what the Constitution requires in Article I, Section 8, Clause 11, sometimes referred to as the “War Powers Clause.”

This clause, however, gives Congress the power “to declare war,” not to approve military intervention short of such a declaration, as has been done numerous times, including operations in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

An [AP report](#) noted that Russia, in a statement from its foreign ministry, warned the United States and its allies on Friday about the possible consequences of striking chemical weapon storage facilities in Syria. The Russian statement said such attacks could release toxic chemicals and give militants or terrorists access to chemical weapons.

“This is a step toward proliferation of chemical weapons not only across the Syrian territory but beyond its borders,” said the statement.



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Pope Francis sent a message to G20 leaders, urging them to abandon what he called a “futile mission.” This is in line with what the predecessor of Francis, Pope Benedict XVI (while still Cardinal Ratzinger), [argued, saying that](#) “reasons sufficient for unleashing a war against Iraq did not exist,” in part because “proportion between the possible positive consequences and the sure negative effect of the conflict was not guaranteed. On the contrary, it seems clear that the negative consequences will be greater than anything positive that might be obtained.”

One of Obama’s few supporters on Syria is French President Francois Hollande, who is a firm advocate for military intervention. Hollande told reporters invited into his meeting with Obama on the sidelines that they came to the summit “wanting as large a coalition as possible.” “To do nothing would mean impunity,” Hollande said. “We must take our responsibility” and act.

France occupied Syria and neighboring Lebanon from the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after World War I in 1918 until 1946, when France granted it independence.

[In anticipation of escalating turmoil in the region, the State Department announced](#) on Friday that it “has ordered a drawdown of non-emergency U.S. Government personnel and family members in Beirut, Lebanon and approved the drawdown of non-emergency personnel and family members who wish to leave Adana, Turkey.”

The [AP report](#) also noted that President Obama’s deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes, said the president has not asked his counterparts to commit their own forces to a U.S.-led strike, but simply to agree that a military intervention is warranted.

“We don’t expect every country here to agree with that position,” said Rhodes.

Speaking outside the G20 summit, Rhodes suggested the United States had given up hope that Russia could be convinced to change its position. “We don’t expect to have Russian cooperation,” he said.

A September 6 article posted on the [VOA](#) (Voice of America) website cited U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon’s statement to world leaders made at a humanitarian meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit, warning against what he called “ill-considered” military strikes that might worsen sectarian tensions in Syria.

Ban warned against “further militarization of the conflict” and said that military strikes could have “tragic consequences.”

A report from [Voice of Russia](#) (the Russian government’s international radio broadcasting service) provided more detailed reporting on Putin’s comments at the G20 summit.

“Will we be helping Syria? We will,” Putin asked and answered. “I presume that everything concerning the so-called use of chemical weapons is a provocation on the part of the fighters, who expect assistance from the outside, I mean assistance from the countries that have supported them from the very start. This is the essence of this provocation,” said Putin.

“The use of force on a sovereign state is only possible if it is done for self-defense, and, as we know, Syria is not attacking the US, or under a decision made by the UN Security Council,” he stated.

“As one participant in our discussion said, those who act otherwise put themselves outside of law,” Putin said.

“At this time, which is generally difficult for the world economy, it would be counterproductive to destabilize the situation in the Middle East, to say the least,” Putin continued.



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Putin also disputed a journalist's claim that G20 members were divided 50-50 over whether military intervention in Syria was justified. "You said the vote was 50/50. This is not quite so. And I can tell you who was in favor of the military operations. As you know, these are the United States, Turkey, Canada, Saudi Arabia and France."

The Russian president said that Russia, China, India, Indonesia, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, and Italy were opposed to using military force in Syria.

[NBC News](#) and other news sources have reported that President Obama will address the nation on TV on Tuesday to make his case for public and congressional support for a military strike.

Photo of President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, Sept. 5: AP Images

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