



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 27, 2013

Obama Ready to Launch Unilateral Military Assault on Syria

U.S. military preparations [are underway](#) for a limited, two-day surgical strike aimed at “punishing” Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for his alleged use of chemical weapons — nerve gas — in last Wednesday’s attack on civilians in nine towns in the Ghouta region east of Damascus that killed an estimated 1,300 people.



According to senior officials in the Obama administration, the attack “would probably last no more than two days and involve sea-launched cruise missiles ... striking military targets not directly related to Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal.” In an accompanying disclaimer, those officials said the launch would be dependent upon three factors:

1. Determining that Assad’s regime was culpable in those attacks
2. Consultation with U.S. allies and with Congress
3. Determination that such an attack could be justified under international law

There are several problems facing the administration. First, it is not clear who exactly will determine Assad’s culpability or when that determination will be made. UN inspectors in the region have been fired upon by rebels and have delayed, by at least one day, their investigation into the attacks.

Secondly, House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) has not had any consultations with any of those senior officials. And thirdly, what possible justification could there be for violating the clear instructions and limitations under Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution that only “Congress shall have power ... to declare war”?

Beating the drums for the pending attack, Defense Secretary John Kerry said:

Make no mistake: President Obama believes there must be accountability for those who would use the world’s most heinous weapons against the world’s most vulnerable people. Nothing today is more serious....

This international norm cannot be violated without consequences.

White House spokesman Jay Carney added: “What we are talking about here is a potential response ... to this specific violation of international norms.”

General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in June that

Potential targets include high-value regime air defense, air, ground, missile and naval forces as well as the supporting military facilities and command nodes.



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Stand-off air and missile systems could be used to strike hundreds of targets at a tempo of our choosing.

Senator Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) said the pending attack by U.S. missiles “should be surgical. It should be proportional. It should be in response to what’s happened.”

House Speaker John Boehner wants the president [to “explain” his actions beforehand](#) and “consult” with Congress before acting. He made no mention of the Constitution’s enumerated powers but instead said:

The options facing the president are complicated, have far-reaching ramifications and may require significant resources.

The president is commander-in-chief. With that power come obligations. One, of course, is to consult with Congress on the options he sees as a viable response [to the chemical attacks].

More than just to Congress, the president has an obligation to the American people to explain the rationale for the course of action he chooses: why it’s critical to our national security, and what the broader strategy is.

When White House spokesman Carney was pressed on the matter, [he demurred by saying](#) that consulting with Congress “does not mean having Congress authorize something.” As of Monday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. EST, Boehner said “this consultation has not taken place.”

John Glaser, [writing in the Huffington Post](#), pointed out succinctly many of the complications facing Obama as he embarks on this plan to punish Assad. First, hitting the chemical plants directly could easily unleash clouds of poisonous gas that could kill more civilians than the original attacks. Instead, Obama would attempt to target the control facilities that launch those weapons, but he has to be careful to “maintain the functions of the state” in order to avoid a power vacuum that would “boost the al-Qaeda-linked rebels and possibly allow them to get their hands on Assad’s chemical weapons.” In other words, Obama has decided that the devil he knows (Assad) is better than the one he doesn’t (the rebels).

But a direct military attack might so enrage Assad that he might elevate his attack on his own people, just as, according to Glaser, “Clinton’s initial bombing of Serbia caused Milosevic to dig in his heels before eventually giving up — most of the Serb atrocities against Kosovar Albanians occurred *after* the U.S. bombing.”

Says Glaser, what Obama is launching is a new kind of war — a punitive war:

That’s something I’m betting the Norwegian Nobel Committee never would have predicted a recipient of their peace prize engaging in. This is not defensive war, since the Assad regime doesn’t present even the remotest threat to America. It isn’t a humanitarian war either, since U.S. airstrikes won’t cripple the Assad regime’s military capacity and may even get more civilians killed.

As John Quincy Adams said in his Independence Day Address in 1821:

America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.

She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

In search of monsters to destroy, President Obama has successfully painted himself into a corner: Congress wouldn’t approve, if asked. The American people have repeatedly stated their resistance to



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such foreign military adventures. The “international community,” especially Russia and China (supporters of the Assad regime), would balk at granting approval.

Glaser wondered what would happen if the president were to come clean about his pending military adventure in Syria:

Given the fact that a mere 9 percent of Americans actually support a U.S. military intervention in Syria, I wonder what it would do to public opinion if Obama was honest with the American people about his petty disciplinary war.

If the president sat in the Oval Office and told the American public that he was bombing another country, not to protect Americans or even Syrians, but “to make a point” or “punish” the Assad regime, with no greater utility, I seriously doubt the mission would gain any legitimacy in the eyes of voters....

So on top of this being a war of choice with no humanitarian utility beyond making Obama feel tough and reliable, it is also sure to be a violation of the Constitution and international law. Couple this with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey’s warning back in April that “unintended consequences are the rule with military interventions of this sort,” Obama’s new war in the Middle East is shaping up to be a doozy.

Photo of President Barack Obama: AP Images

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