



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 2, 2013

Obama Unsure Who's Behind Syrian Chemical Attacks — or Is He?

Based on previous pronouncements from U.S. officials, one would have thought it certain that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had deployed chemical weapons against rebels seeking to overthrow him. President Barack Obama, however, has just called that assertion into question, saying that the United States still knows very little about the alleged use of chemical weapons and needs to be certain before it intervenes overtly in the two-year-old civil war.



Obama had previously stated that the use of chemical weapons was a “red line” that the Syrian government dared not cross without risking U.S. intervention. Last week he declared that chemical weapons use by the Assad regime constituted a [“game changer”](#) that would trigger military action against the regime.

But at a Tuesday White House press conference, the president was considerably more circumspect. Asked about U.S. policy toward Syria, he said that while there is evidence of chemical weapons use in that country, “we don’t know when they were used, how they were used. We don’t know who used them. We don’t have a chain of custody that establishes” exactly what happened.

In short, the Obama administration knows next to nothing about the alleged chemical weapons attacks — or at least that’s what the administration would like us to believe.

In fact, not long after the initial reports of the attacks, it became fairly obvious that the Assad regime was not behind them. “Intelligence sources last month [March] were saying that the largest such ‘attack’ was almost certainly launched by the rebels, noting that it targeted Syrian troops and used a more primitive type of agent than the Syrian arsenal is believed to consist of,” says [Antiwar.com](#).

Why, then, does Obama act as if the attacks remain shrouded in mystery? Most likely it’s because, as [The New American](#) reported in March, the United States is “reportedly ... arming, training, and financing” the rebels, “an establishment-backed coalition composed largely of foreign jihadists, self-styled al-Qaeda members, and other Islamic extremists.”

That the administration is waist deep in the Syrian civil war was made clear by the fact that when the attacks were first reported, “U.S. officials weren’t even willing to concede that an attack happened at all,” according to [Antiwar.com](#). Meanwhile,

The Syrian government was so confident of this being the rebels that they were the first to call for a UN investigation, and it only stalled because instead of conducting an investigation the UN sought a mandate to probe the entire chemical weapons arsenal and everything else in the entire nation. Iran appears equally comfortable that this wasn’t their ally’s doing, insisting any chemical weapons use is a “red line.”

Obama cannot, therefore, finger the real culprits in the attacks. At the same time, recalling the



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embarrassment of the Bush administration's claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, he cannot risk being caught lying about the Syrian government's culpability. Thus, he pretends that nothing is yet known about the attacks.

That doesn't mean he won't try to pin them on Assad. In his press conference he "said the administration was using all its resources to determine the facts about" the chemical weapons attacks, according to the Associated Press. That could mean a genuine search for the truth, but it could also mean concocting phony evidence to "prove" that Assad deployed the weapons.

If Obama could indeed convince enough people that Assad was behind the attacks, then what? The AP writes:

If it can be established that the Syrian government used chemical weapons, he added, "we would have to rethink the range of options that are available to us."

"Obviously there are options to me that are on the shelf right now that we have not deployed," he said, noting that he had asked Pentagon planners last year for additional possibilities. He declined to provide details.

In other words, "proof" that the Syrian government deployed chemical weapons means the United States will go to war with Assad.

It's no secret, of course, that Obama wants Assad to take leave of the nation that he has ruled for the past 13 years and his father ruled for the prior 30. His administration has already called for Assad to step down and has been making noises about intervening for some time (and, as noted earlier, has almost certainly done so behind the scenes). Obama has also been under pressure to intervene from [hawkish Republicans in Congress](#), and neither he nor these legislators seem to be concerned in the slightest that the Constitution does not permit the president to send troops into battle without a congressional declaration of war.

One needn't have a long memory to recall Obama's last unconstitutional foray into overthrowing an Islamic autocrat. Just two years ago he unilaterally ordered U.S. intervention on behalf of rebels seeking to oust Libya's Moammar Gadhafi — despite having [told](#) the *Boston Globe* in 2007 that "the President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation." Then, as now, U.S. involvement was preceded by dubious claims of atrocities by the foreign government, covert aid to less-than-trustworthy revolutionaries, and calls for intervention from many of the same quarters in Washington. Given the outcome of that intervention (see, e.g., Benghazi), one might expect Obama to think twice before embarking on the same course in Syria.

Alas, few people learn from history — fewer still in Washington. Without a firm stand against U.S. involvement in Syria from voters and their representatives on Capitol Hill, it seems likely that Obama will indeed get our country embroiled in yet another conflict in an Islamic country. Al-Qaeda, naturally, will be thrilled by such an eventuality for it will provide an excellent opportunity for recruitment. For Americans, on the other hand, it means only more dead and injured servicemen, billions of additional tax dollars down the tubes, and increased potential for terrorist retaliation.

Photo is of a propaganda billboard for President Bashar al-Assad



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