



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 4, 2013

Republicans Ready to Cave to Obama War Plans

If, as Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) have been proposing for months, U.S. missiles “crater” Syrian airfields, shoot down Syrian planes, and establish a “safe zone” for rebel forces, we will be at war with Syria in all but name. Yet according to McCain et al, the president could do all that without a declaration of war from Congress.



In the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and other GOP stalwarts appear ready to join Senate counterparts McCain, Graham, and others in bowing to Obama’s global mission of defending peace through what some have called “humanitarian bombing.” Even Democrats, who have been known to turn rather completely against wars they had previously authorized, may be walking into a trap by voting to authorize the military action, because Obama can force them to share in the blame if it turns into a debacle.

Despite statements by President Obama and others urging military action against Syria that such action will not involve U.S. “boots on the ground,” Secretary of State John Kerry said the boots and bodies of those ground troops are on “the table” and among the options for possible use by the president in the effort to punish and deter Syria’s alleged use of chemical warfare against rebel forces attempting to topple the Damascus regime.

“I don’t want to take off the table an option that might or might not be available to the President of the United States to secure our country,” Kerry [said](#), indicating that a ground invasion to secure Syria’s chemical weapons may become reality.

Indeed, securing those weapons would require a ground invasion, and without securing them, vague proposals for a military strike or strikes against Syria make little-to-no sense. Only if such strikes were to lead to a ground war would they succeed in the ultimate goal of “securing” the weapons from either side in the two-and-a-half-year civil war in the Arab nation that has killed an estimated 100,000 people or more.

The determination to take nothing “off the table,” could, if taken at face value and carried to its logical conclusion, lead to the United States responding to Syria’s alleged use of chemical weapons with our own use of nuclear weapons against that nation. The chemical weapons may have, according to reports, killed roughly one thousand people, including women and children. Nuclear weapons would, of course,



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kill hundreds of thousands.

President Obama, who has claimed he needs no authorization from Congress to launch military strikes against Syria, is nonetheless seeking such authorization for moral and political support and to add a noted of legitimacy to what will surely be denounced as illegal and unjust acts of war. There has been no effort to get authorization from the United Nations, since Russia and possibly other countries would almost certainly veto any resolution for it in the Security Council.

The authorization the president seeks from Congress has been criticized as [overly broad](#), even if the lawmakers approve of a strike against Syria. The draft proposed by the White House and released last Saturday would authorize the president to use American armed forces “as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in connection with the use of chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in the conflict in Syria.” Should Congress approve such language, the president would clearly be in a position to argue that the legislated authorization for him to determine what is “necessary” trumps his merely verbal commitment to exclude from consideration the introduction of U.S. “boots on the ground.” Every option, spoken or merely imagined, will remain “on the table.” There is also nothing in the wording above that would limit the president’s actions if another nation or nations — let us say Iran — were to use chemical weapons or supply Syria with the materials for them.

“The resolution that they are presenting right now is so open-ended, I think even people who are sympathetic to the administration might have trouble supporting it,” said Representative James McGovern, a Democrat from Massachusetts. Sen. Roy Blount (R-Mo.) said the breadth of the resolution “creates lots of concern with me and others.” He expects the request will be narrowed by the time the full House and Senate return from summer recess next week.

But wars have an almost certain way of exceeding what is authorized on paper. It has been nearly 50 years, but many Americans may remember that the [Vietnam Resolution](#), passed after the alleged attacks on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, was worded to authorize the president to take whatever action he determined necessary to protect U.S. forces and other American personnel in South Vietnam. Later that was called a “functional declaration of war” as the United States committed more than half a million men to a war that lasted more than a decade and did not turn out well for the United States or South Vietnam.

In 1980, the United States sided with Iraq in its war with Iran, despite the reports of Iraq’s use of chemical weapons against Iranian forces as well as against its own rebellious Kurdish population. Nearly a quarter of a century later, the United States cited that use of chemical weapons in its indictment of Iraq, prior to the U.S. invasion of that country and a war-torn occupation by U.S. and coalition forces that lasted nearly nine years.

Following the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, Congress moved in great haste to pass the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, containing wording broad enough to be cited by the Bush and Obama administrations as cover for a wide range of otherwise illegal activities, including CIA “black hole” prisons overseas and the spying on American phone calls and electronic communications by the super-secret National Security Agency.

All of this has occurred despite the Democrats’ rhetorical devotion to civil liberties and the Republican hosannas to the rule of law and limited, constitutional government. Both parties appear locked in now to support for the “imperial presidency,” having embraced it for short-term political advantage, while attempting to disown it when used for tactical advantage by the opposing party.



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As for the Republicans, the “loyal opposition” appears neither loyal nor inclined to oppose much of anything important. If it exists at all, it must be lost or hiding in what might justly be called “Boehner’s cave.”

Photos from left to right: Sen. John McCain, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, House Speaker John Boehner, Sen. Lindsey Graham



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